

YEREVAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Marina Galstyan

ARMENIAN YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS OF UNCERTAINTY AND HOPE



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**ARMENIAN YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS OF
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Armenian Youth at the Crossroads of Uncertainty and Hope book presents the social condition of young people in Armenia within the context of uncertainty and polycrisis. Based on qualitative and quantitative research it explores how Armenian youth construct identities, navigate transitions to adulthood, pursue education and employment, and imagine their futures in a social environment shaped by socio-economic instability, political change, war, displacement, and rapid societal transformation. The book presents summary of the monograph, Armenian Youth at the crossroads of uncertainty and hope, that was published in Yerevan State University Press House in Armenian.

The book was prepared within the research project “Armenian Youth in Post-War Armenia: Research and Discourse”, implemented under the leadership of Marina Galstyan, in collaboration with the Center for Educational Research and Consulting. This project is made possible through the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The views expressed in this book belong solely to the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foundation. This publication is made possible through the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Support by the Foundation does not constitute endorsement of any specific opinion, perspective or approach expressed or utilised in this publication.

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Author's Note

This book presents a comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of the lives, opportunities, and challenges of young people in Armenia. The purpose of this work is not only to present research data, but also to demonstrate how young people's personal experiences, social realities, and the broader public policy environment interact and shape the dynamics of contemporary youth life in Armenia.

The analytical framework used in this research seeks to view youth not merely as a separate social group, but as active actors within complex social systems. Through young people's experiences, a wide range of public, social, and institutional processes are expressed, questioned, and reconsidered. The research process revealed that Armenian youth have diverse and sometimes contrasting experiences in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. Their views, lived experiences, and perceptions should not only be heard, but also meaningfully integrated into policy development, program design, and public discussions. This report is part of that effort. It offers evidence-based insights and conclusions that can be useful for policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and civil society actors working in the fields of youth policy, education, social development, and public engagement.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that any research both creates opportunities for understanding and is shaped by specific temporal, spatial, and methodological limitations. In this regard, the analysis presented reflects the research team's commitment to responsibility and scientific rigor, while remaining open to further research, new methodological approaches, and deeper analysis. This research does not aim to provide final or fixed conclusions. Instead, it treats youth experience as a dynamic and multi-layered social process that requires continuous attention, analytical sensitivity, and methodological flexibility.

Future social, economic, and political changes, as well as shifts in public relations and lived realities, may expand, refine, or transform the conclusions presented in this book. Our expectation is that this research will contribute to strengthening academic analysis of youth, uncovering often overlooked social processes in Armenia, and supporting the development of evidence-based policies, educational interventions, and public strategies. We hope that this book will enrich knowledge about Armenian youth, broaden public discourse on the challenges they face, and contribute to more informed, data-driven policy decisions in the future. Ultimately, this book encourages researchers, policymakers, and civil society

actors to adopt a more critical and multi-dimensional approach to understanding Armenian youth - not only as representatives of the country's future, but as active contributors to its present.

I hope you find this book interesting and useful.

Marina Galstyan

List of Abbreviations

CERC	Center for Educational Research and Consulting
CSO	Civil society organization
EU	European Union
IDI	In-depth interview
LSG	Local self-government
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RA	Republic of Armenia
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YSU	Yerevan State University

Introduction

War and post-war societies have long faced serious global challenges, particularly related to social recovery, social reorganization and cohesion. In Armenia, the combined impact of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the 44-day Artsakh war created a deep crisis marked by uncertainty and the need for rapid adaptation by society, social groups, and individuals. The developments around Artsakh in 2023 further intensified social pressure, leading to the forced displacement of more than 120,000 Armenians to Armenia. As a result, understanding how society adapts to post-war conditions has become highly relevant, particularly in relation to changing social relations, vulnerabilities, and institutional transformations.

Post-war society is not the same as a society at peace. Even after large-scale fighting ends, tensions and clashes may continue, keeping the risk of renewed conflict present. In Armenia, the post-war context has created serious challenges across many areas, including the socio-economic situation of young people and their participation in political and civic life. Studying Armenian youth is especially important in the context of ongoing and complex social change. These conditions produce mixed and sometimes contradictory responses among young people to public and social issues. Youth development in such settings is often non-linear and uneven, and fragmented, which can influence the future development of society as a whole. Many young people face health, psychological, and social difficulties as a result of the war and require support for social adaptation, particularly those directly affected by war and displacement experiences. In this regard, special attention should be given to young people who participated in the war.

It is also important to examine how young people's views of their future change after the war. Continued border tensions after 2020 have kept the sense of insecurity alive, affecting all areas of young people's lives. In parallel, the share of economically inactive youth is increasing, and in some contexts young people face growing economic vulnerability compared to older age groups.

Armenian youth are dealing with complex challenges as they adapt to new circumstances and gain experience. Studying these processes is important both for academic understanding and for developing practical responses to youth needs. This research focuses on the key challenges faced by Armenian youth after the 2020 war, their psychological and socio-economic needs, and their resilience, capacities, and lived experiences, pathways toward independence, and visions of the future.

Part 1. Research Methodology

Chapter 1. Research goal and objectives

The overall goal of the study is to examine the situation of young people in post-war Armenia by identifying their key needs, assessing how the consequences of the war have affected different groups of youth, and analyzing the main factors that influence youth resilience and coping capacities.

The project focuses on a comprehensive study of Armenian youth within the post-war social, economic, and political context. The 2020 war had a profound impact on Armenian society, with particularly strong effects on young people, influencing their daily lives, opportunities, and future prospects. These impacts continue to shape multiple areas of life, including education, employment, psychological well-being, civic participation, and perceptions of security.

The study of youth-related challenges provides an in-depth understanding of the needs, experiences, goals, and aspirations of Armenian youth in the post-2020 post-war context. This knowledge supports professionals working with young people and contributes to the development of evidence-based youth policies and targeted programs, with particular attention to socio-psychological well-being, education and employment, sense of safety, and participation in civic and public processes.

Table 1. Matrix of research objectives

	Research objectives	Data collection methods		
		In-depth Interviews (IDI)	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)	Quantitative Survey
1	Identify the individual needs, capacities, and lived experiences of young people			
2	Explore public perceptions related to youth and post-war realities			
3	Analyze the mechanisms and dynamics of public opinion formation			
4	Identify group-level adaptation practices			
5	Examine group needs, shared experiences, challenges, and capacities			
6	Explore public and collective adaptation and resilience mechanisms			

Age. The study was conducted among young people aged 13-35, in line with the age definition set out in the Law on Youth Policy of the Republic of Armenia (RA). The division into age groups (13-17, 18-22, 23-29, 30-35) allows for analysis of differences across key stages of youth development, highlighting the most relevant needs and challenges for each group.

Geographical Coverage

The research was carried out in Yerevan and all regions (marzes) of Armenia. Additional criteria for selecting communities included border areas and communities most affected by the war, in order to capture diverse post-war experiences.

The study followed **participatory research principles**, whereby young people aged 13-35 were not only research participants but also actively involved in the research process. They tested and helped refine research tools, took part in data collection as interviewers or co-organizers of FGDs, and were involved in the preliminary analysis of findings.

Both **quantitative and qualitative data** collection methods were used, allowing the study to combine large-scale statistical data with young people's subjective experiences. To address the research objectives, the following data collection methods were applied.

Chapter 2. Data collection methods

The data collection methodology was based on triangulation of data sources, methods, and findings. Evidence obtained through the desk review was combined with results from field research, while consultative discussions helped refine and validate key conclusions. This approach made it possible to generate both a broad statistical overview and an in-depth analysis grounded in individual and group experiences.

Desk review

At the initial stage, a secondary analysis of documents was conducted. Sources included publications and datasets from the Statistical Committee of the RA and other state institutions, demographic and labor market data, research reports on youth, as well as the Law on Youth Policy and related legal and programmatic documents. This analysis provided a solid evidence base and ensured consistency with field research findings.

Consultative meetings with key informants

The study included consultative meetings with specialists working on youth-related issues, representatives of state bodies, and local and international organizations. Additional discussions were held with educators, historians, sociologists, social workers, psychologists, human resource specialists, and policymakers. These consultations helped identify post-war priority issues, review ongoing programs and initiatives, and highlight information gaps relevant to the effective design and implementation of youth strategies and interventions.

Online survey

Quantitative data were collected through a self-administered online survey conducted among 1,000 young people aged 13-35 across all regions (10 marzes) of Armenia. The survey captured information on psychological well-being, education and employment, future plans, sense of security, civic participation, war-related impacts, migration intentions, and other key experiences and challenges.

In contemporary sociological research, especially in youth studies, online self-administered surveys are widely used not only instead of face-to-face interviews or in emergency situations, but as a standard method of data collection. With the broad use of digital technologies, social reality-especially the everyday life of young people-has increasingly shifted to online spaces, transforming patterns of

communication, self-expression, and participation. As a result, data collection approaches have also evolved to adapt to the conditions of a digital society.

To assess the suitability of online surveys for quantitative data collection, a preliminary methodological review was conducted. Given that the target group of this study - young people aged 13-35 is highly active in digital environments (Livingstone et al.), probability sampling was not applied due to the absence of a complete sampling frame. Instead, quota sampling was used to control sample structure by gender, age, region, and type of settlement based on official statistics. This approach enabled continuous monitoring and correction of sample composition during fieldwork and is consistent with international practice, where representativeness in online surveys is often ensured through active fieldwork management rather than sampling design alone (Bethlehem, 2010).

The use of an online self-administered survey offered several additional advantages:

1. **Higher level of openness** - The self-administered format reduces social desirability bias, as respondents do not interact with an interviewer. This is especially important for sensitive topics such as war, security, psychological well-being, uncertainty about the future, and political or civic views.
2. **Inclusion of hard-to-reach groups** - The online format enabled participation of youth who would otherwise be difficult to reach, including border community residents, displaced youth from Artsakh, working students, and socially or politically inactive groups.
3. **Time flexibility** - Respondents could complete the questionnaire at a convenient time, which is particularly important for young people who study, work, or have caregiving responsibilities.
4. **Wide geographical coverage** - Youth from Yerevan and all regions of Armenia were included without the logistical constraints of physical presence.
5. **Cost-effectiveness and efficient use of resources** - The method reduced fieldwork costs while maintaining sample size and territorial coverage.
6. **Standardization of the survey instrument** - All respondents received the same questionnaire in the same order, eliminating interviewer-related variation.
7. **Data quality control** - The use of the Jotform platform allowed the application of logical filters, mandatory responses, and technical control mechanisms.
8. **Youth-friendly communication environment** - For young people, online surveys are perceived as more familiar and less institutional, supporting higher engagement.

9. **Anonymity** - Anonymous participation was essential given the sensitivity of many topics.
10. **Alignment with international research practice** - Many international youth studies (e.g., EU Youth Surveys, ESS youth modules, World Values Survey youth subsamples) widely use online self-administered surveys.
11. **Dual consent procedures** - All participants provided informed consent, and for respondents aged 13-17, parental or guardian consent was also obtained.

Overall, the combination of an online self-administered survey and quota sampling was considered the most effective and methodologically justified approach for this study. It enabled wide territorial coverage, high youth participation, ethical compliance, and structural balance of the sample. Identified limitations were mitigated through methodological control mechanisms, and the resulting data were considered valid and appropriate for the research objectives.

Focus-group discussions

FGDs were conducted to explore how different groups of young people perceive the post-war situation, their expectations, everyday challenges, views on participation in public life, and the mechanisms shaping shared perceptions and experiences. Groups were organized to include participants with relatively similar backgrounds and experiences, allowing clearer identification of subgroup-specific needs, values, and perspectives. Focus groups were conducted with youth who were less represented in the quantitative survey or had distinct experiences. A total of 10 FGDs were held with the following groups:

1. Working students
2. Students studying outside their home community
3. Students in cultural and creative fields
4. Students of secondary vocational institutions (Vagharshapat, Armavir region)
5. Youth not in education or employment (NEET)
6. Unemployed youth (Ashtarak, Aragatsotn region)
7. War participants
8. Youth from border communities (Yeraskh, Ararat region)
9. Rural youth (Geghaker, Armavir region)
10. Youth displaced from Artsakh (Goris, Syunik region)

In-depth interviews

IDIs were conducted with young people to explore the experiences of youth with different social roles and employment statuses, their perceptions of the post-war

situation, and their plans and aspirations. This method made it possible to examine the personal experiences and viewpoints of 15 young people whose lives have been directly or indirectly affected by the post-war context. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the following groups:

1. **Political and civic leaders** - This group included interviews with a member of the National Assembly, an administrative official, and young people actively engaged in CSOs and local self-government bodies (LSGs). Their perspectives were essential for understanding the role of youth in political processes and their involvement in decision-making at the community, regional, and national levels (4 interviews).
2. **Bloggers and public opinion influencers** - This group included a journalist, blogger, and media influencer with a large social media audience. The interview helped explore how media narratives and digital platforms shape young people's daily lives and behavior (1 interview).
3. **Economic leaders** - IDIs were conducted with young entrepreneurs and young people who have achieved success in business or are implementing innovative initiatives, providing insight into economic engagement and leadership among youth (2 interviews).
4. **Cultural leaders** - This group included a representative from the creative sector, allowing exploration of the specific features and challenges of cultural and creative work in the post-war context (1 interview).
5. **Youth living in border communities** - Interviews with young people residing in border areas helped capture the specific experiences and challenges of everyday life in these communities (3 interviews).
6. **Youth displaced from Artsakh** - These interviews focused on experiences of displacement and resettlement, including integration challenges and future plans (2 interviews).
7. **Youth who participated in the war** - Interviews with young people who took part in the war, including conscript soldiers and volunteers, helped reveal the social and psychological impacts of war experiences, their perceived role in society, and pathways of post-war adaptation (2 interviews).

Chapter 3. Sampling methodology

Qualitative research sample

The selection of participants for the qualitative component of the study was guided by an analytical model developed within a scientific study¹ published in 2024. The model is based on a typology of Armenian youth identified through previous research. In this study, the following five youth groups were used to select participants for FGDs and IDIs: “innovative leaders,” “advocates of stability,” “adapters/ritualists,” “discouraged and disoriented youth,” and “self-affirming youth.” Applying this typology made it possible not only to test the relevance of these categories in the current Armenian context, but also to refine the typology and conduct a comparative analysis with findings from earlier research. The sample was constructed using the socio-demographic characteristics associated with each youth type.

Quantitative survey sample

Quantitative data collection for this study was conducted using a quota-based sampling approach, designed in line with the research objectives, the characteristics of the target group, and the selected online data collection method. The target population consisted of young people aged 13-35, a group that is socially and geographically diverse and highly active in digital environments. A stratified quota sampling method was applied to ensure alignment with key statistical proportions. While the sample is not random in the classical sense, it provides a structurally comparable representation of the main socio-demographic characteristics of the target population. This approach is widely used in sociological research when probability sampling is technically or methodologically challenging and when the primary goal is structural description and comparative analysis. Attention was given to the inclusion of socially and territorially vulnerable groups, including youth living in border communities, youth displaced from Artsakh, and NEET young people. Although equal statistical representation across all subgroups cannot be fully ensured, this approach helped reduce structural limitations associated with online surveys.

1 The social adaptation practices of RA youth in post-war Armenia, Higher Education and Science Committee

The reference population for the study was the 13-35-year-old youth population of Armenia, which, according to official statistics, totals 929,313 individuals. Sample design followed a two-stage process. In the first stage, stratification was carried out based on key territorial and socio-demographic criteria: administrative division (Yerevan and regions), type of settlement (urban and rural), gender, and age groups (13-17, 18-22, 23-29, and 30-35). In the second stage, quotas were set within each stratum to align the sample structure with the actual population distribution. This ensured representation of youth from Yerevan and all regions, across both urban and rural areas, while maintaining gender and age balance. The final sample size was 1,000 respondents, which, with a 95% confidence level, corresponds to an estimated margin of error of approximately $\pm 3.1\%$. Throughout fieldwork, continuous monitoring of data collection and sample composition was carried out by region, gender, and age. Where underrepresentation was identified, targeted outreach through partner organizations and youth networks was used to recruit participants from specific groups. These adjustments were made without altering the questionnaire content or order, ensuring consistency and comparability of the data.

Assessment of Survey Distribution, Reach, and Response Rate

The quantitative survey was conducted over a 30-day period during October-November. The online survey link was distributed through partner organizations, youth organizations, and community and thematic networks, using various social media and messaging platforms. Analysis of participation dynamics during fieldwork identified three consecutive phases of survey implementation. In the **first phase**, the survey link was published on the website and social media pages of the Center for Educational Research and Consulting (CERC), as well as on other online platforms. Distribution during this stage was largely organic and based on voluntary sharing by users. This phase lasted approximately one week and resulted in around 300 completed questionnaires. In the **second phase**, the distribution strategy was expanded to increase participation and raise awareness of the survey's purpose and content. The survey link was actively shared via multiple platforms (Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram) and accompanied by explanatory materials. During this period, a series of youth-focused infographics was published on the Center's social media pages, presenting the study's themes, objectives, and participation logic in a clear and accessible format. This communication effort significantly increased engagement,

and over a two-week period the total number of completed questionnaires reached approximately 800. In the **third and final phase**, interim data analysis was conducted to assess the alignment of the sample's gender, age, and regional distribution with the structure of the target population. Based on these findings, targeted outreach was carried out among underrepresented gender, age, and regional groups. This final phase ensured sample balance and resulted in a final dataset of 1,025 completed questionnaires.

Overall, the survey link was viewed 11,345 times, including both unique and repeated views across platforms. For methodological reasons, the response rate was calculated based not on total views, but on effective reach, estimated at 6,833 unique users, in line with international practice for online surveys. Of the users who accessed the survey, 1,025 respondents completed the questionnaire. Seventeen responses were excluded due to technical or methodological issues, and eight respondents aged 13–17 did not complete the survey due to missing parental or guardian consent. As a result, the preliminary analytical dataset included 1,008 questionnaires, from which 1,000 valid responses were selected for analysis, in accordance with the planned sample size. The final **response rate** of the survey was **15%**, calculated as follows:

$$1,025 / 6,833 \times 100 \approx 15.0\%.$$

This level of participation is consistent with internationally accepted benchmarks for voluntary online sociological surveys and is considered sufficient for large-scale youth research^{2,3,4}.

Overall assessment of sampling deviations and research findings

Despite the control measures applied during data collection, some deviations from the planned proportions were observed in the sample structure. However, these deviations fall within the calculated margin of error and do not have a systematic character. A comparative analysis of gender, age, and regional distributions shows that the differences between the sample and the target

² Selection Bias in Web Surveys, Bethlehem, J.,

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0040162509000757>

³ New Developments in Survey Data Collection, Couper, M. P. (2017),

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-statistics-060116-054058>

⁴ Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, Dillman, Smyth & Christian (2014), <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-statistics-060116-054058>

population are not statistically significant and do not undermine the overall validity of the research findings. The distribution of the target population by region and the number of survey participants are presented in **Table 2** and **Table 3**, respectively.

Table 2. Distribution of Youth Aged 13-35 in Armenia by Region

Region	Youth population by region (N)			Distribution by region (%)		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Aragatsotn	7,937	34,281	42,218	0.9	3.7	4.5
Ararat	22,865	62,688	85,553	2.5	6.7	9.2
Armavir	26,557	62,895	89,452	2.9	6.8	9.6
Gegharkunik	20,397	57,814	78,211	2.2	6.2	8.4
Lori	38,068	28,663	66,731	4.1	3.1	7.2
Kotayk	42,610	39,223	81,833	4.6	4.2	8.8
Shirak	42,087	33,092	75,179	4.5	3.6	8.1
Syunik	26,516	15,181	41,697	2.9	1.6	4.5
Vayots Dzor	4,689	10,610	15,299	0.5	1.1	1.6
Tavush	14,840	22,718	37,558	1.6	2.4	4.0
Yerevan	315,582		315,582	34.0		34.0
Total	562,148	367,165	929,313	60.5	39.5	100

Table 3. Distribution of survey participants aged 13-35 by region

Region	Survey participants (N)			Distribution by region (%)		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Aragatsotn	25	21	46	2.5	2.1	4.6
Ararat	37	53	90	3.7	5.3	9.0
Armavir	46	44	90	4.6	4.4	9.0
Gegharkunik	42	36	78	4.2	3.6	7.8
Lori	51	22	73	5.1	2.2	7.3
Kotayk	49	34	83	4.9	3.4	8.3
Shirak	42	36	78	4.2	3.6	7.8
Syunik	19	26	45	1.9	2.6	4.5
Vayots Dzor	13	10	23	1.3	1.0	2.3
Tavush	31	23	54	3.1	2.3	5.4
Yerevan	340		340	34.0		34.0
Total	695	305	1,000	69.5	30.5	100

Overall, the differences observed between the sample and the target population are not statistically significant. These variations can be explained by sampling fluctuation and do not indicate structural distortion of the sample. Moreover, the

deviations are neither one-sided nor systematic; they are not concentrated in specific regions and do not show a consistent deviation from the population structure. Rather, in some regions the share slightly exceeds the planned proportion, while in others it is slightly lower-an expected pattern in quota-based sociological research. Some differences were also observed in the gender and age distribution of survey participants compared to the target population (**Table 4** and **Table 5**).

Table 4. Age and gender distribution of youth aged 13 - 35 in Armenia

Age	Youth population by region (N)			Distribution by region (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
13-17	105,657	93,113	198,770	11.4	10.0	21.4
18-22	88,035	78,368	166,403	9.5	8.4	17.9
23-29	125,759	127,086	252,845	13.5	13.7	27.2
30-35	146,902	164,393	311,295	15.8	17.7	33.5
Total	466,353	462,960	929,313	50.2	49.8	100

Table 5. Age and gender distribution of survey participants aged 13-35

Age	Survey participants (N)			Distribution by region (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
13-17	92	144	236	9.2	14.4	23.6
18-22	68	134	202	6.8	13.4	20.2
23-29	123	135	258	12.3	13.5	25.8
30-35	173	131	304	17.3	13.1	30.4
Total	456	544	1,000	45.6	54.4	100

Comparison of age and gender data between the target population and survey participants also indicates some differences. However, these differences are not statistically significant, fall within the margin of error, and do not compromise the overall validity of the findings. Overall, the sample's age-gender structure continues to reflect the core characteristics of the target population. In summary, the stratified quota sampling method used in this study - combined with continuous monitoring and targeted adjustments - provided a level of representativeness sufficient for the research objectives. Identified limitations were explicitly acknowledged, analyzed, and methodologically considered during

interpretation. As a result, the data can be regarded as sociologically sound and suitable for analyzing the social situation and perspectives of young people.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The age and gender distribution of participants in the quantitative study has already been presented in the previous section, in the context of sample design and comparability. This section outlines other key socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed youth, which are important for interpreting the findings and for understanding the broader social context of the study.

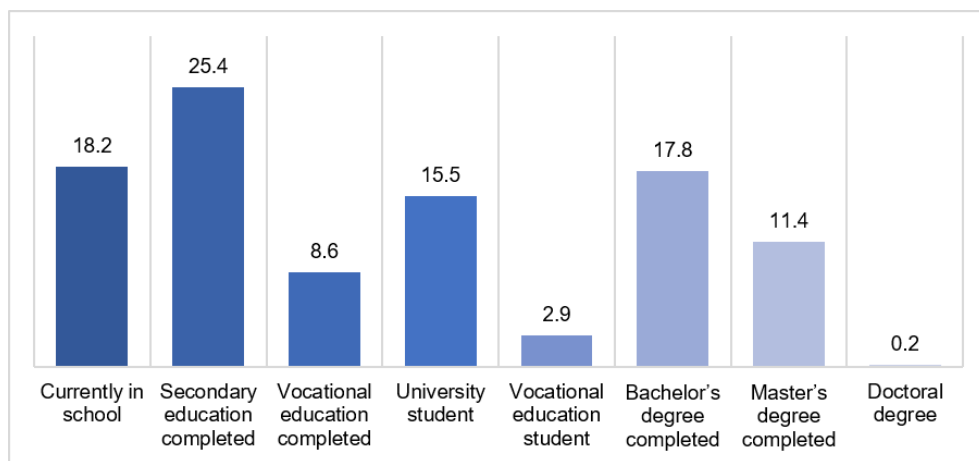


Figure 1. Educational level of survey participants

The distribution of educational attainment among participants reflects a diverse educational profile. Overall, the education levels of respondents are broadly comparable with official national statistics on youth education in Armenia. Minor differences observed are not sociologically significant and are typical of voluntary online surveys, without affecting the overall validity of the data. When education levels are examined by age and gender, some structural differences emerge. Female participants show higher involvement in higher education: the share of women currently studying at universities (20.8%) and those who have completed a master's degree (14.5%) exceeds the corresponding shares among men (9.2% and 7.7%, respectively). At the same time, the proportion of respondents with only secondary education is higher among men (36.8%) compared to women (15.8%).

Most respondents (92.7%) reported that they were born and have permanently lived in Armenia. At the same time, the data capture experiences of mobility and forced displacement. Overall, 4.0% of participants are youth displaced from Artsakh, including both citizens of Armenia (2.7%) and individuals with temporary protection or refugee status (1.3%).

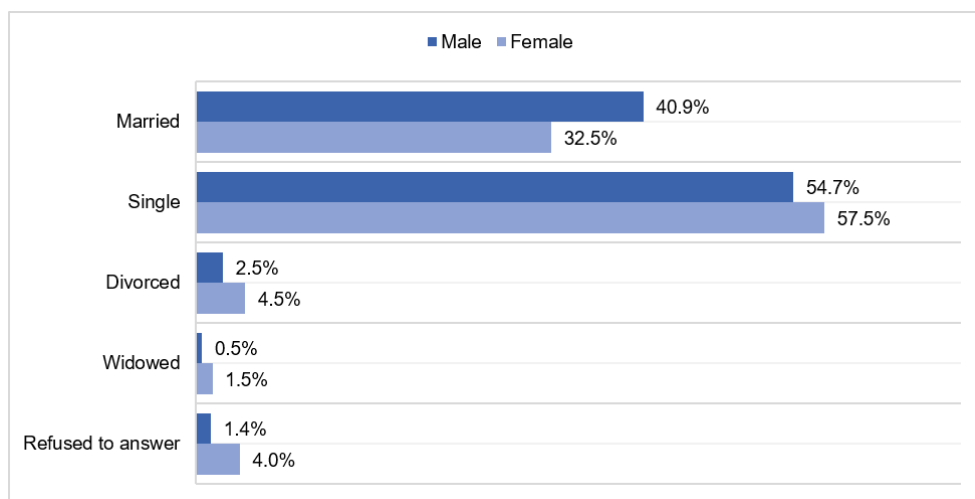


Figure 2. Marital status of survey participants

Questions on marital status were answered by respondents aged 18 - 35 (N=764). Within this group, 36.5% reported being married, 56.2% single, 3.5% divorced, and 1.0% widowed. Differences are also observed by age and gender: the share of married men (40.9%) is higher than that of married women (32.5%).

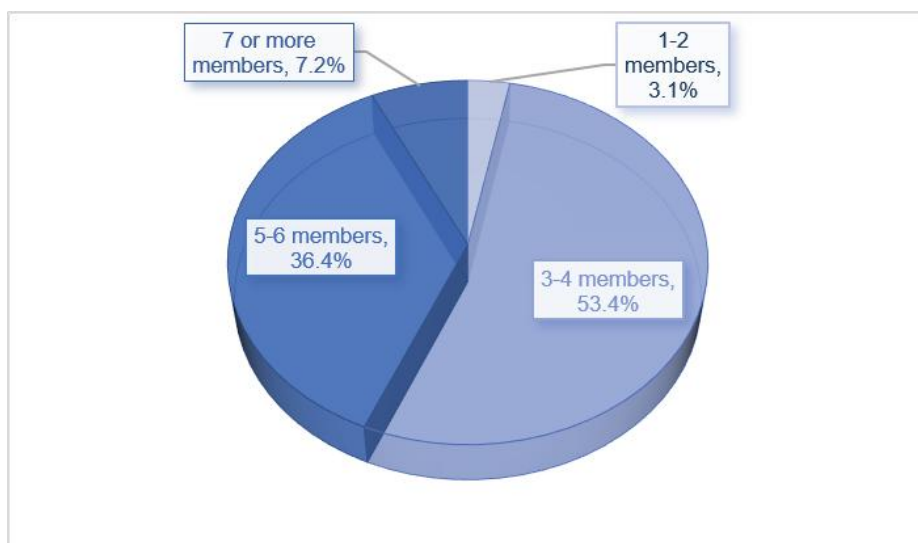


Figure 3. Number of household members

Most young people live in medium-sized and large households. More than half of respondents (53.4%) reported living in households with 3-4 members, which represents the most common family model in Armenia. A substantial share (36.4%) lives in households with 5-6 members. Only 3.1% of respondents live in small households of one or two people, indicating that independent living or single-person households remain relatively limited among young people.

Part 2. Analysis of Research Findings

Chapter 4. Youth identity

Classical sociological approaches to identity are grounded in the concept of symbolic interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead (1934), Herbert Blumer (1937), and Erving Goffman (1959). Building on this tradition, contemporary youth researchers often view identity as a project constructed across multiple contexts. In late modernity, this project may lack a stable foundation, while postmodern perspectives emphasize the fluid, fragmented, and unstable nature of identity. These conditions are linked to identity uncertainty, where economic unpredictability makes it increasingly difficult to build and sustain stable identities. In this sense, youth increasingly means learning to live with uncertainty. Processes of individualization have expanded, leading to more diverse identities and lifestyles.

Contemporary psychological and sociological approaches to youth identity formation can be summarized as follows: identity is culturally embedded, always shaped within a specific cultural, temporal, and spatial context; identity is an unfinished project, developing throughout the life course rather than reaching a fixed adult form; identities are often overlapping and sometimes conflicting (e.g., ethnic belonging, gender, student or worker status), requiring individuals to actively integrate these roles into a coherent identity narrative; and the prolongation of youth⁵ reflects growing socio-economic complexity, which can bring both risks (instability, dependence) and opportunities (greater autonomy, experimentation, and self-direction).

In academic literature, the beginning of youth is not linked to a single event. Instead, the transition to an independent youth life is commonly associated with several key indicators: completion of formal education, entry into the labor market, leaving the parental home, marriage, and parenthood⁶.

In **2025**, the **Law on Youth Policy of the Republic of Armenia** formally defined youth as follows: *a young person is an individual aged 13 to 35 who is a citizen of*

⁵ Furlong, A. Youth Studies: An Introduction. USA: Routledge, 2013,

⁶ Manzoni A. Conceptualizing and measuring youth independence multidimensionally in the United States. *Acta Sociologica*, 59(4), 2016, 362–377.

*the Republic of Armenia or a non-citizen legally residing in the Republic of Armenia*⁷.

Age boundaries of youth have long been debated in academic, policy, and applied research. Of particular interest is how young people themselves perceive the beginning and end of youth. According to survey data, 41.5% of participants identified the beginning of youth at age 16, while 37% defined its end at age 35.

Table 6. Perceptions of the beginning and end of youth

	Beginning of youth	End of youth
Average age	16.2	35.1
Median	16	35
Standard deviation	≈ 1.7	5.4
Minimum	13	23
Maximum	26	45
	41.5% mentioned 16 years old	37% mentioned 35 years old
	25% mentioned 13-15 years old	18.3% mentioned 30, 13.2% - 40

Qualitative findings show that these age boundaries are understood less in biological terms and more through social experience. Being young is described as a phase in which individuals begin to understand how social systems operate and how to position themselves within them. Youth is seen not only as a period of personal development, but also as a stage of civic awareness and public positioning. The beginning of youth is often linked to the moment when individuals start making independent decisions and taking responsibility for their consequences.

Gender differences are also evident. Girls tend to identify an earlier beginning of youth (ages 15 - 16) than boys (16 - 17), and an earlier end (32 - 35 versus 36 - 40). Overall, 68% of respondents perceived youth as lasting 15 - 24 years. Boys more often described youth as a longer phase, while girls viewed it as starting earlier and ending sooner. For girls, an earlier perceived end of youth is frequently linked to social expectations around family formation and caregiving. For boys, the extension of youth is associated with prolonged processes of self-proving, professional establishment, and financial stability.

⁷ Law of the Republic of Armenia on Youth Policy, adopted on March 5, 2025, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=166629&utm>

Young people in Armenia commonly associate the beginning of youth with experiences of independence and personal responsibility. Key pathways include entering vocational or higher education - especially outside one's home community - living independently from parents, military service, becoming a parent, and civic engagement such as volunteering or participation in protests. These events are not perceived merely as life-course transitions, but as moments of internal and social reorganization that require navigating uncertainty. Independence is described not as freedom of choice, but as a necessary skill for coping, stability, and resilience.

Most participants identified completion of general secondary education as the start of youth. The shift to mandatory 12-year education has encouraged many students to continue in vocational institutions rather than upper secondary schools, increasing independence through early career choice and relocation for education. Statistical data on college admissions⁸ show a growing number of young people entering primary and secondary vocational education. This pathway is often perceived as a clear boundary between childhood and independent life, particularly when combined with separate living arrangements and first experiences of financial autonomy.

Another important marker of transition is the expansion of social networks. Participants noted that childhood ends when family ceases to be the main social reference point and peers, friends, and professional circles become more influential. This shift is accompanied by changes in values, behavior, and self-perception.

For me, childhood ends when your surroundings start to matter more than your family. That's when you're no longer just a child of your family, but part of a wider social circle.

FGD with NEET youth

For many participants - especially young people displaced from Artsakh - war was identified as a decisive and often traumatic factor in the transition from childhood to youth. War accelerated maturity, often in traumatic ways, making childhood and adolescence feel shortened or incomplete. Youth, in this context, becomes a phase defined by emotional restraint, discipline, and psychological resilience. Young men also emphasized the role of military service.

⁸ RA Statistical Committee, [databases](#)

After the war, I realized that no matter the situation, you have to stay calm and balanced. That was the real end of childhood for me - when I went to the army and the fighting started.

IDI, young man in the business sector

Parenthood is widely perceived as marking the end of youth, primarily due to reduced personal freedom and increased responsibility for others. At the same time, becoming a parent is described as a qualitative identity shift, where experimentation gives way to stability and care.

When asked whom they imagine when hearing the word “youth”, participants most frequently described a young person as someone who:

- is responsible for personal decisions (31%),
- is full of energy (23%),
- has dreams and goals and tries to achieve them (20%),
- is independent and makes decisions autonomously (19%),
- is open to new ideas and change (18%).

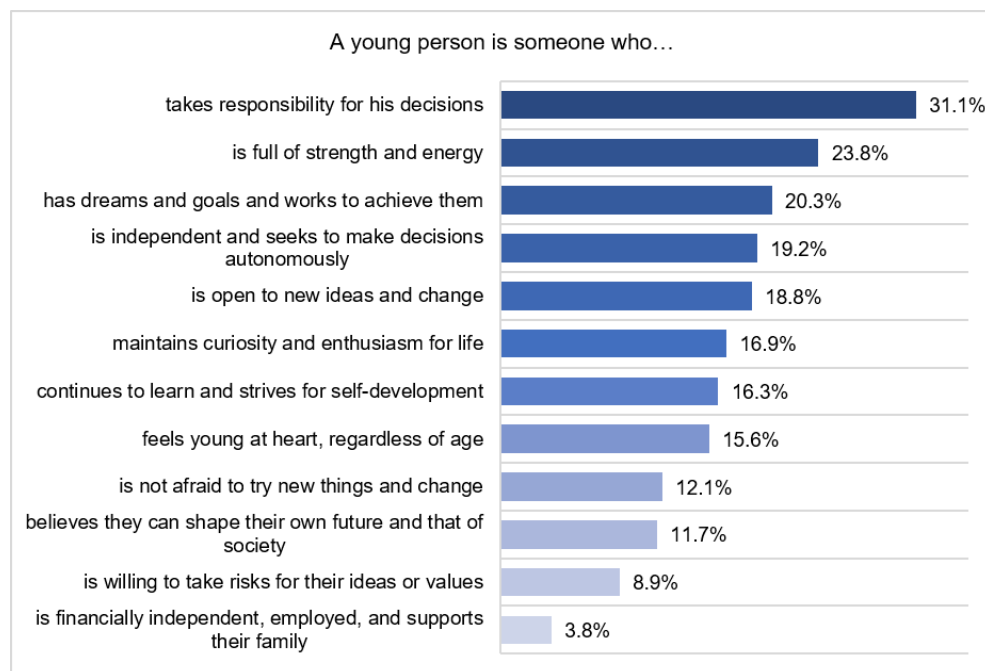


Figure 4. When you hear the word “young person,” whom do you imagine? A person who...

Youth identities also show a degree of polarization. On one side is the image of **socially engaged, patriotic, future-oriented youth**; on the other, a model of withdrawal and social detachment. This polarization is not seen as an individual failure, but as a result of unequal opportunities and an uncertain environment. For some, youth continues to be redefined as a time for learning, change, experimentation, and relative freedom.

Civic and political engagement also features prominently in youth identity. Youth is associated not with short-term activism, but with persistence, resilience, and sustained involvement. Leadership and mentorship emerge as important elements, with self-realization linked to supporting others and shaping the public environment.

Comparison with others is another recurring theme. Young people view comparison both as setting goals and as a source of constant pressure. This “comparison with the best” is deeply rooted in post-Soviet social norms, simultaneously encouraging self-development and producing insecurity, especially when success is framed as mandatory.

In summary, the key characteristics of youth identity indicate that youth in Armenia is generally perceived as beginning around the ages of 15 - 16 and is closely linked to experiences such as entering professional or higher education and starting to live independently. The end of youth is most often associated with becoming a parent, having fewer opportunities for experimentation and exploration, increased responsibility, and greater limitations on personal freedom. In post-war Armenia, youth identity is shaped by early maturity, intense life experiences, and a growing sense of collective responsibility. As a result, being young carries not only personal meaning, but also broader social and community significance.

Chapter 5. Youth education

In youth studies, research on education and learning - both formal and non-formal - has always held a central place. This is largely because children and young people spend a significant part of their lives in educational settings such as schools, colleges, and universities, and these experiences strongly influence their future life paths. Education is not only a stage of learning, but also a social environment that shapes values, expectations, identities and life trajectories. Youth studies are interdisciplinary by nature. Research on education has traditionally had a strong sociological orientation and shares many common concerns with the sociology of education. Rather than examining educational systems in isolation, youth researchers often apply a systemic and holistic approach, viewing education as dynamically interconnected with other dimensions of young people's lives, including family background, labor market conditions, social inequalities, and identity formation. In studies focusing on youth and education, researchers typically address the following key themes:

- Mobility: education as a process that can either reduce or reproduce social inequalities,
- Skills development: education as a pathway through which young people acquire knowledge and skills, including hard skills, soft skills, and meta-skills,
- Lifestyle and life patterns: education as a context that shapes everyday practices, aspirations, and ways of living,
- Identity: education as both a process and an environment for the formation of youth identity⁹.

In the post-war context, the social role of education has expanded. It is increasingly perceived not only as a space for developing skills and professional qualifications, but also as a source of stability and predictability. Educational engagement functions as a mechanism through which disrupted life routines are restored and a minimum sense of future certainty is rebuilt, even in conditions of ongoing uncertainty. Against this background, the analysis turns to the extent to which formal and non-formal education today contributes to young people's skills development - particularly in terms of becoming competitive in the labor market and realizing personal potential. Research findings indicate that the perceived value of education is shifting from the value of the diploma toward the value of applicable knowledge. Education is increasingly assessed based on its ability to

⁹ Wyn, J., Educating for late modernity, in A. Furlong (ed.), *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2009

support adaptability, independence, practical orientation, and competitiveness in the labor market, rather than solely its institutional credentials.

Career Orientation

Career orientation is closely linked to higher education admission patterns. An overview of admissions to public higher education institutions in 2015 shows clear differences by field of study.

Table 7. Number of Admissions to Public HEIs in Armenia by Field of Study, 2015

Field of study	Number of admitted students
Humanities	4,858
Economics and Management	3,439
Agro-food sector	1,628
Culture and Arts	1,145
Education and Pedagogy	1,114
Physical and Mathematical Sciences	913
Health Sciences	860
Natural Sciences	630
Construction and Architecture	358
Life Safety, Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management	274
Informatics and Computer Engineering	266
Social Sciences	227
Service Sector	227
Information Technologies and Information Security	202
Electronic Engineering, Radio Engineering and Communications	190
Transport Systems	171
Energy, Power Engineering and Electrical Engineering	161
Metallurgy, Mechanical Engineering and Materials Processing	67
Geology and Mining	34
Automation and Control	26
Instrument Engineering and Biomedical Technology	24
Chemical Technologies and Biotechnology	18
Food Technology	13
Printing	5

A comparison with admission data ten years later indicates notable shifts in preferences. Although changes in methodological classification should be taken into account, several general trends are evident:

- growing interest in information and communication technologies,
- increased interest in arts and creative fields,
- consistently high demand for business and economics,
- declining interest in physical and mathematical sciences.

Table 8. Number of Admissions to Public HEIs in Armenia by Field of Study, 2025

Field of study	Number of admitted students
Business and Administration	3,539
Social and Behavioral Sciences	1,955
Information and Communication Technologies	1,850
Education	1,730
Arts	1,683
Philology	1,536
Health Sciences	1,288
Law	1,025
Personal Services	847
Engineering	604
Humanities	358
Architecture and Construction	326
Mathematics and Statistics	317
Physical Sciences	200
Industry and Technology	173
Security Services	165
Journalism and Information Sciences	115
Environmental Studies	111
Agricultural Sciences	96
Biological Sciences	85
Veterinary Medicine	61
Social Work	55
Chemistry	40
Earth Sciences	38
Forestry	28

In the current context, career choice is often perceived as a risk-management decision, shaped not only by personal interests (“what do I want to do?”) but also

by considerations of stability (“what allows for a secure life?”). In this context, choosing a profession is linked less to a single fixed pathway and more to adaptability and the possibility of changing direction over time, which is viewed as a strategy for managing uncertainty.

Among surveyed students aged 13-17, around 73% reported having already decided on a future profession. Those who had made a choice were predominantly girls. The most frequently preferred professions were programmer, lawyer, and entrepreneur.

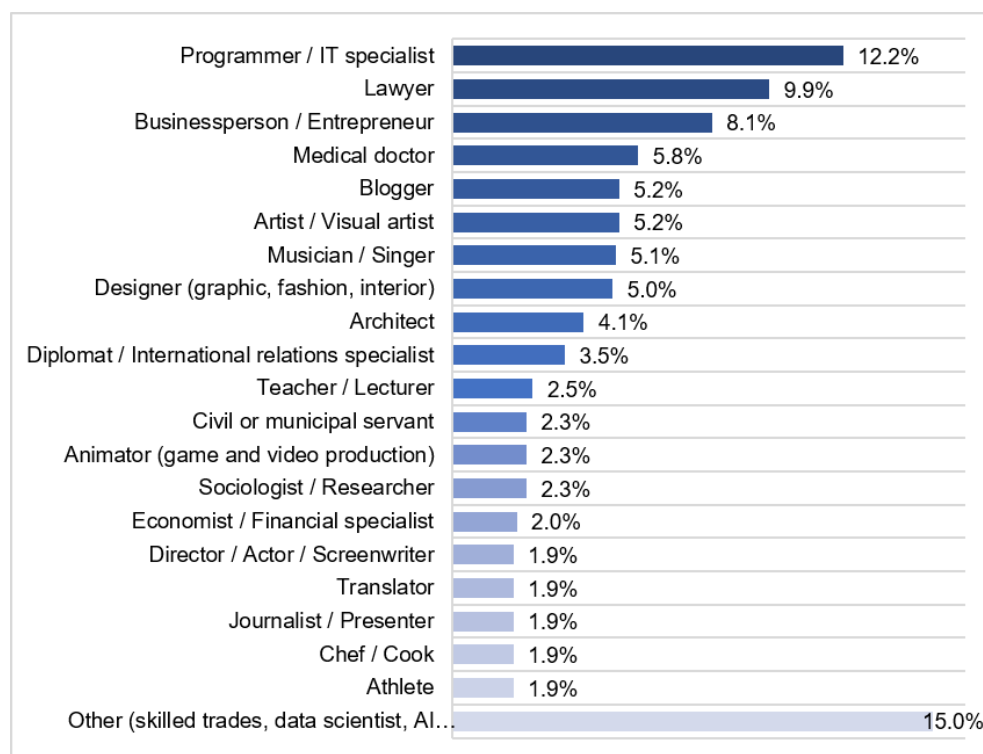


Figure 5. Career preferences of students aged 13 - 17 (%)

Quantitative survey results indicate that two main factors shape career orientation: the expectation of earning income in the chosen profession and the desire to be useful. Qualitative findings add nuance to this picture, showing that “being useful” often carries a civic and public dimension. Education is viewed not only as a means of personal advancement, but also as contributing to social resilience and future development, where professional skills are understood as part of the country’s broader capacity. FGDs and IDIs further show that career decisions are influenced by factors operating at different levels.

Micro level: the young person's individual characteristics, personality, and identity

Career choices are strongly shaped by favorite school subjects and early-formed interests. Participants often described their professional decisions as rooted in interests developed during school years. Alongside personal preferences, a strong need for control and predictability also plays a significant role. Career choice is frequently guided by an internal logic of “choosing something that allows for stability.” This is particularly pronounced in contexts of uncertainty and crisis, where education functions not only as a tool for self-expression, but also as a form of self-protection and security.

Meso Level: Family

Although young people emphasize their growing independence, the socio-economic status of the family and parental influence continue to play a significant role. In the process of career choice, a dual mechanism of family control and support is evident. In particular, parents working in creative fields tend to encourage their children to pursue professions within the same domain.

The family's role is especially decisive in relation to the ability to finance professional or higher education. Families often guide young people toward fields where tuition-free places are more accessible or where education costs are relatively lower. As a result, career choices are frequently shaped not only by aspirations but also by financial feasibility.

Family influence therefore operates not only as guidance and support but also as a constraint. Limited financial resources may compel young people to reconsider their preferred profession and opt for a more accessible educational pathway. Under such conditions, educational choices often follow a “second-best option” logic, involving the reassessment of goals and adjustment to available resources.

Macro Level: the Education System

Young people living in Armenia's regions face structurally unequal conditions in career choice. Access to higher education is often shaped by the geographical distance between a young person's place of residence and universities offering the desired field of study. Participants consistently note that limited local educational options, combined with financial constraints, significantly reduce opportunities to pursue higher education outside their home communities.

In my class there were 25 students, and only four of them entered higher education, because the financial situation did not allow the others to continue studying.

Excerpt from a FGD with students from regional communities

Unequal access to professional and higher education contributes to the reproduction of territorial inequalities, which directly influences career trajectories and constrains the range of available professional options.

I would have liked to study psychology. I was already interested in it in Artsakh, but then the war started. Now I'm in Goris, and the faculty I want doesn't exist here. If I want to study, I have to go to Yerevan. But living in Yerevan is expensive - you need money.

Excerpt from a FGD with displaced youth from Artsakh

Territorial factors thus represent a central dimension of educational inequality. The concentration of higher education institutions in Yerevan and a small number of major cities not only limits access to specific professions but also disrupts educational continuity - particularly for young people with experiences of displacement. In such contexts, educational pathways are often reshaped not by personal aspirations, but by location, institutional availability, and the financial costs of relocation and living away from home.

In response to these constraints, young people increasingly prioritize professions that enable employment across multiple or related sectors. The adaptability of a profession becomes a key criterion in career decision-making, reflecting broader structural uncertainties within the education and labor market systems.

In the post-war context, the demand for an “adaptive profession” serves a protective function. Flexibility, opportunities for reskilling, and the perceived ease of changing professional direction are prioritized when selecting educational pathways. These features function as practical substitutes for long-term stability in an environment marked by prolonged uncertainty, economic volatility, and disrupted life trajectories.

Youth Skills, Capacities, and Strengths

The development of young people's skills and capacities is shaped by a set of interconnected educational infrastructures operating at different levels. These infrastructures influence not only access to learning, but also the quality, relevance, and applicability of acquired skills.

Formal Education

General education schools. As of 2025, approximately 1,395 general education schools were operating in Armenia, serving 424,944 students. The regional distribution of schools is presented below.

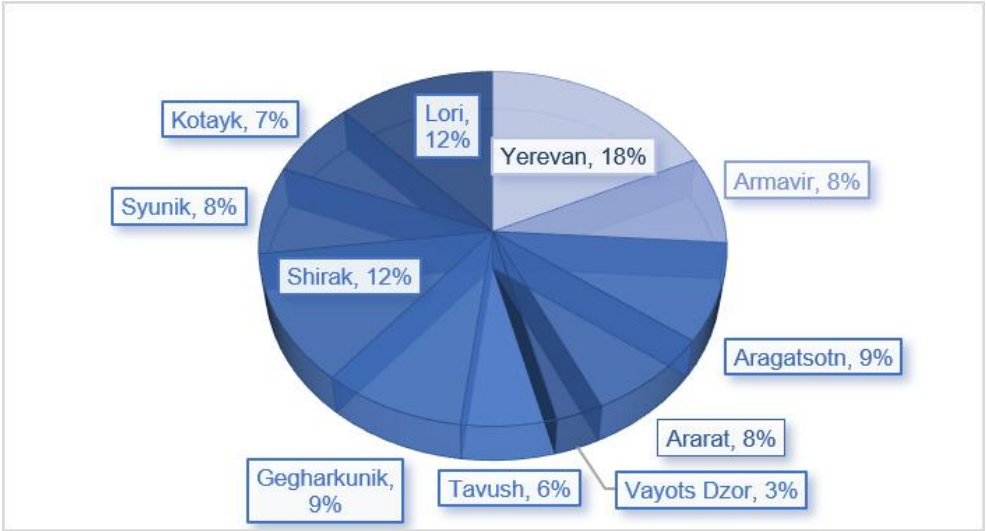


Figure 6. Number of General Education Schools

Vocational schools and colleges. In 2025, Armenia had 66 vocational schools and 123 colleges, with 8,957 and 38,920 students respectively. Around 24% of vocational schools and 43% of colleges are in Yerevan. A relatively higher number of colleges operate in Syunik, Shirak, and Lori, while fewer are found in Aragatsotn and Vayots Dzor. Vocational schools are more common in Shirak, Syunik, and Kotayk, and less prevalent in Armavir.

Findings from qualitative research suggest that the quantitative accessibility of the formal education system does not always translate into qualitative outcomes. While the educational environment is positively assessed as a space for developing independence and initiative, participants frequently highlight a lack of practical orientation and experiential learning opportunities. Criticism is directed not only at teaching quality, but also at the limited support education provides for developing skills related to risk-taking, experimentation, and navigating real-life situations.

Higher education institutions. In 2025, Armenia had 68 higher education institutions and higher-education-providing organizations, including branch campuses, enrolling approximately 76,000 students. Of these, 84% studied at

public universities, and 85% of public university students were enrolled on a fee-paying basis. Compared to other education levels, higher education is the most centralized system in Armenia: most universities and students are concentrated in Yerevan.

During the 2024 - 2025 academic year, around 18,000 young people were admitted to universities. As shown in the chart, university admission numbers have remained relatively stable over the past ten years, while enrollment in initial and secondary vocational education has increased. Notably, college enrollment has doubled, a trend partly explained by the introduction of compulsory 12-year education, which has led many young people to pursue a profession within this framework.

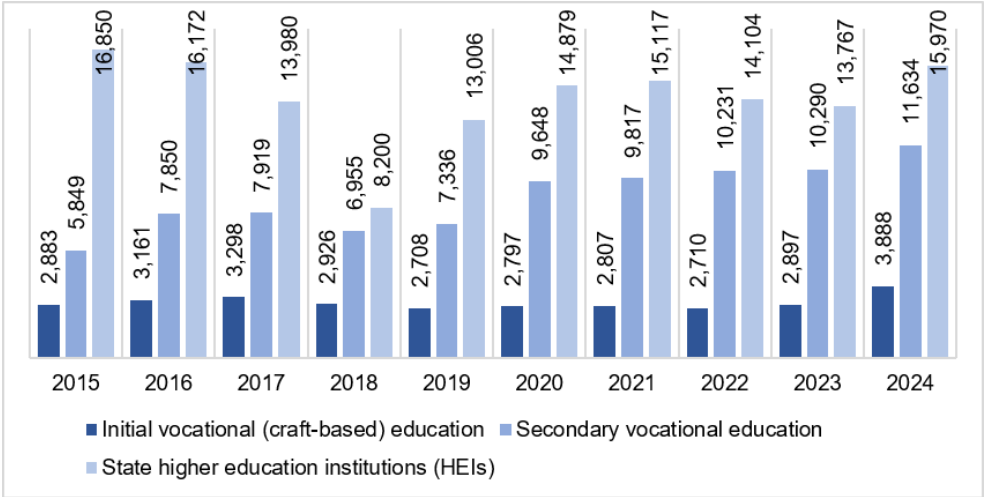


Figure 7. Dynamics of Enrollment in Vocational Education Institutions, 2015 - 2024 (Statistical Committee of Armenia)

Qualitative findings also reveal a mismatch between educational pathways and the actual demands of the labor market. Education is expected to provide not only theoretical knowledge, but also opportunities for practical application, hands-on experience, and preparation for real-world conditions. In this context, the value of education is measured less by its volume and more by its applicability.

Students view higher education as a space for developing independence, initiative, and rethinking their professional identity. Attitudes toward a chosen field often change during the course of study; professional identity is neither stable nor predetermined. Career choice frequently does not end with university

admission - academic and professional identities continue to evolve within higher education. Some young people, through involvement in volunteer or research groups, later reassess their fields, sometimes becoming disillusioned due to systemic constraints, and in other cases becoming more motivated as they recognize the potential of their profession. The second and third years of study often represent a critical turning point, when many students report a crisis related to their future career paths.

Participants of the FGDs and IDIs highly value student life as a context for self-development, while simultaneously criticizing the system's overall effectiveness. Sectoral reports and research also point to persistent challenges in the quality and efficiency of both general and vocational education, particularly shortcomings in infrastructure, including facilities and laboratory conditions, as well as mismatches between acquired skills and labor market needs. Although Armenia's education system has undergone multiple structural reforms in recent decades, combined evidence from reports and evaluations indicates that deep, systemic problems persist across both formal and vocational education.

Non-Formal Education

Thirty-three percent of young people reported that they had participated in at least one short-term course during the past year. In terms of regional distribution, youth from Syunik and Tavush were the most active participants. This may be explained not only by individual initiative, but also by the availability of short-term training opportunities in these regions. By contrast, young people living in Yerevan, as well as in Ararat, Armavir, Lori, and Kotayk, were less likely to participate in such courses.

The short-term courses attended by young people covered a range of topics, including foreign languages; media, communication, and content creation; computer skills; programming and information technologies; accounting, finance, and business planning; and digital marketing and advertising, such as social media marketing (SMM) and Google Ads.

The growing demand for non-formal education is closely linked to the need to compensate for the limitations of formal education. Short-term courses, self-directed learning, and learning on the job are perceived as rapid-response tools that help young people remain competitive in rapidly changing labor market conditions, update their skills, and reduce the feeling of "knowledge obsolescence."

When asked which option they would prefer for learning something new, the most common responses were self-education (25.2%) and short-term courses (24.3%). These were followed by learning on the job (17.2%), formal educational institutions (13.2%), and online platforms (12.7%). In many cases, education is increasingly perceived as a continuous process of “self-investment” and ongoing adaptation, where emphasis is placed not on the one-time completion of an institutional pathway, but on ongoing training, independent learning, and the accumulation of practical experience.

The research also provided insight into young people’s strengths, particularly among those with leadership experience in various fields. These strengths include professional skills, digital competencies, high resilience and perseverance, the ability to adapt in complex situations, creativity (such as writing, drawing, or producing original content), emotional awareness, the ability to remain calm and think clearly under pressure, rapid orientation and decision-making, optimism, goal orientation, and a strong work ethic.

At the same time, young people identified a range of skills and capacities they would like to further develop or improve. These include communication skills; self-presentation and self-promotion skills (including the ability to “sell” oneself or turn ideas into media products); leadership skills; negotiation skills; and the ability to manage emotions. According to the findings, the demand for skill development is linked not only to personal growth, but also to self-presentation and social advancement. The need for self-promotion and effective self-presentation is increasingly viewed as a condition for survival and value creation in today’s labor market, particularly in contexts characterized by high competition and unequal access to opportunities.

Most young people reported having at least one education-related goal. The majority expressed a desire to continue self-education, enroll in higher education, or participate in short-term training courses. Young people who reported having no education-related goals were primarily in the 23 - 35 age group, with a noticeable predominance of men.

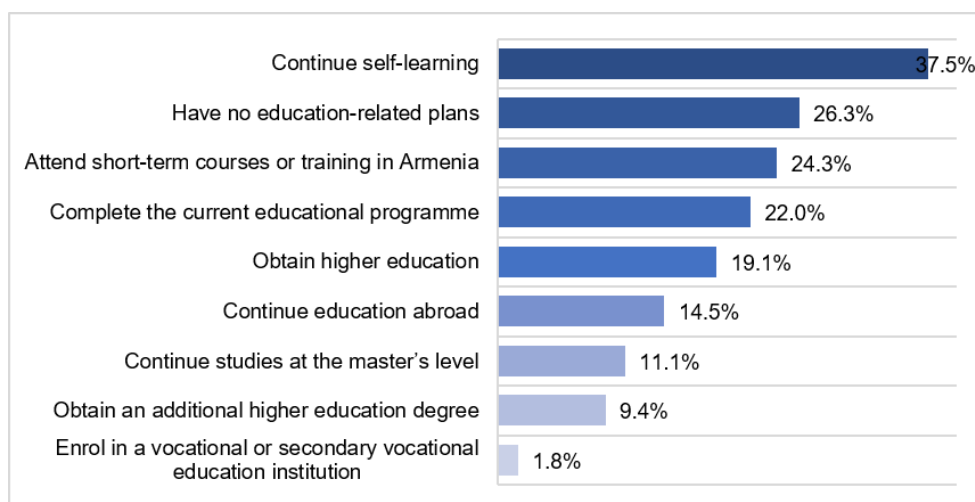


Figure 8. What is your main education-related goal for the next three years?

In some cases, the absence of educational goals is not the result of a lack of motivation, but rather of prolonged fatigue, socio-economic pressures, and the prioritization of stability. Under such conditions, education is temporarily deprioritized and postponed as a goal to be pursued at a later stage.

Overall, the findings suggest that career choices among young people in Armenia are shaped more by early educational socialization and the accessibility of educational opportunities than by calculated labor market considerations. The “non-calculative” nature of educational pathway selection is often linked to strategies for managing uncertainty: career choice becomes less about rational market forecasting and more about seeking stability, ensuring flexibility, and minimizing potential losses. In this context, education functions not only as a tool for social mobility, but also as a mechanism for resilience and identity preservation.

At the same time, Armenia’s educational landscape is characterized by a simultaneous expansion of access and deepening challenges related to quality, effectiveness, and equity. Despite the wide network of general education schools and the availability of formal vocational education, these systems do not fully provide the foundational competencies necessary for young people to develop a stable professional identity, adapt to changing labor market conditions, and successfully enter the labor market. Expectations for improving the education system increasingly extend beyond infrastructure and curriculum modernization to include stronger practical orientation, experiential learning, and expanded opportunities for gaining real-world experience, starting from the school level.

Persistent territorial inequalities, outdated material and technical infrastructure, programs misaligned with labor market demand, and weak career guidance continue to characterize both vocational and higher education systems. As a result, career choices and professional identities are often shaped through experience, adjustment, and, at times, disappointment rather than through clearly structured and predictable pathways.

Chapter 6. Youth employment

Youth studies have long focused on patterns of work and employment, particularly transitions from education to employment, labor market integration, and processes of social reproduction during early careers. The transition from education to work remains one of the core themes in youth research. Pathways that were once perceived as linear and predictable have increasingly become fragmented, involving interruptions, reversals, and hybrid statuses. In recent years, employment has been less associated with “normal” career development and more with the need to secure a minimum level of stability and economic security. For many young people, work functions primarily as a survival strategy under conditions of socio-economic uncertainty, while long-term professional self-realization and career planning are often postponed.

According to the survey, 46% of young people reported having engaged in paid work during the two weeks preceding the survey. Employment rates are higher among men, increase with age, and are more prevalent among married respondents. Employment is highest in Yerevan, followed by rural areas, and lowest in urban settlements outside the capital. Regionally, employment rates are highest in Yerevan, Aragatsotn, and Ararat, and lowest in Tavush and Armavir. Approximately one-third of students combine paid work with their studies.

Among employed youth, 56.5% hold permanent registered jobs, while 13.4% are engaged in temporary or unregistered work. Stable employment is most common among those aged 23 - 29, whereas informal and temporary jobs are concentrated among 18 - 22-year-olds. Job stability and formal registration are valued not only for legal reasons but also for the sense of predictability and control they provide; in contrast, informal work is often a necessity rather than a choice, serving as an entry point to the labor market or a means of securing basic income. Most permanently employed youth have bachelor's or master's degrees, while those in informal or temporary jobs are more likely to have secondary education or still be studying. Overall, 62% of working youth are salaried employees, 24% are self-employed, and 8% run registered businesses. Self-employment, most common among men aged 30–35, is often pursued as an adaptive strategy for autonomy, though it typically involves limited resources, higher risks, and lengthy adjustment periods.

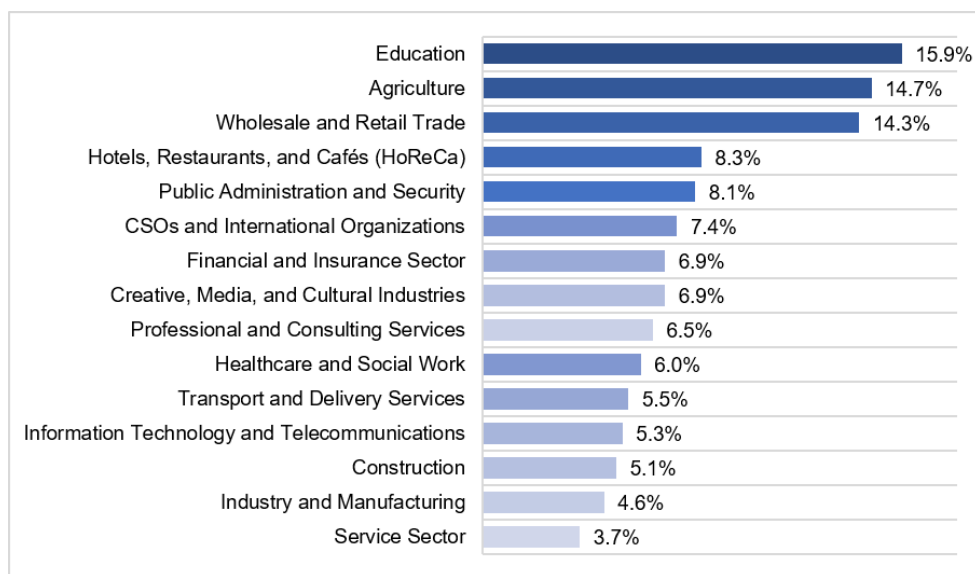


Figure 9. Sectors of youth employment

Young people are primarily employed in education, agriculture, and wholesale and retail trade. Gender differences are evident: women are more frequently employed in education, civil society, and service sectors, while men dominate agriculture, trade, industry, construction, transport, and delivery services.

The average age at first paid employment is 19.3 years (median: 20), indicating that half of respondents entered the labor market before age 20. Only 26.5% work in their field of specialization, while 38.2% work outside their profession and 18.7% in related fields. Working within one's profession is more common among women, youth aged 23-29, and residents of Yerevan, particularly in education, healthcare, social work, ICT, public administration, and security sectors. Working outside one's specialization is more common among younger men in regional cities, especially in trade, agriculture, transport, and delivery services.

FGDs indicate that alignment between education and employment is often accidental rather than planned. Many young people describe their current jobs as opportunities that emerged unexpectedly rather than as outcomes of career planning. Professional identity frequently evolves during higher education and is rarely fixed at the point of admission. Volunteering, research involvement, or exposure to systemic constraints can lead to both disillusionment and renewed motivation. Non-alignment between education and employment is not solely due to labor market mismatch. For some, immediate income needs override long-term

educational or professional goals. In such contexts, changing career paths is perceived not as instability but as an adaptive response to uncertainty.

When asked about factors influencing job attainment, young people most frequently cited personal qualities and skills, followed by education and specialization, while personal connections were mentioned less often.

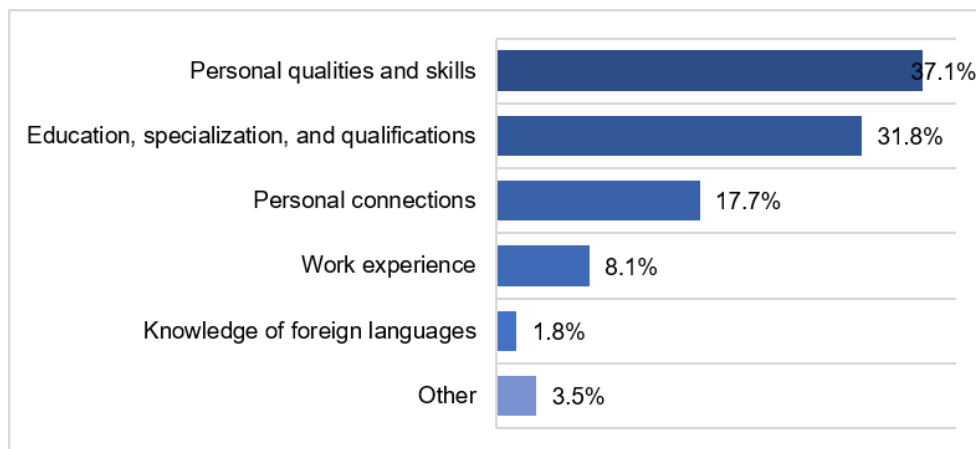


Figure 10. What had the greatest influence on finding a job

Approximately 46% of employed youth plan to change their workplace, particularly those aged 18-22. Job change intentions are most common among youth with medium monthly incomes (AMD 150,000 - 300,000), with higher pay cited as the primary motivation. Frequent job changes do not necessarily indicate irresponsibility; rather, employment is viewed as a space of continuous experimentation in search of fairer, more predictable, and value-aligned work environments.

Employment stability and perceived competitiveness are shaped not only by education but also by accumulated life experience. Youth with backgrounds in civic engagement, war-related experiences, or prolonged informal work often report higher resilience and crisis-management skills. Competitiveness is understood as a dynamic process involving adaptation, skill acquisition, and cross-sectoral engagement rather than attachment to a single profession.

Nearly 15% of youth plan to work abroad within the next year. Labor migration intentions are linked not only to economic motives but also to the search for predictability and control over the future. In this logic, changing jobs and changing countries represent different degrees of the same adaptive strategy.

Among unemployed youth, over 39% have never worked. This group is disproportionately composed of women and youth aged 18-22. Long-term unemployment (over three years) is more common among married women aged 30-35. The most frequently cited reasons for not working include the inability to find a job matching expectations, insufficient salary offers, and difficulty combining work with studies.

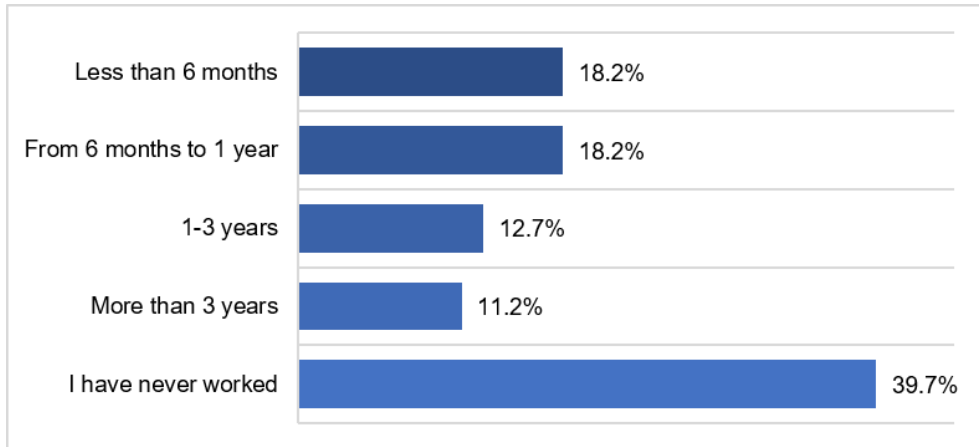


Figure 11. How long have you been unemployed?

Desired job characteristics are dominated by high pay, stability, and security. The importance of high income is particularly emphasized by men and by youth aged 23 - 35.

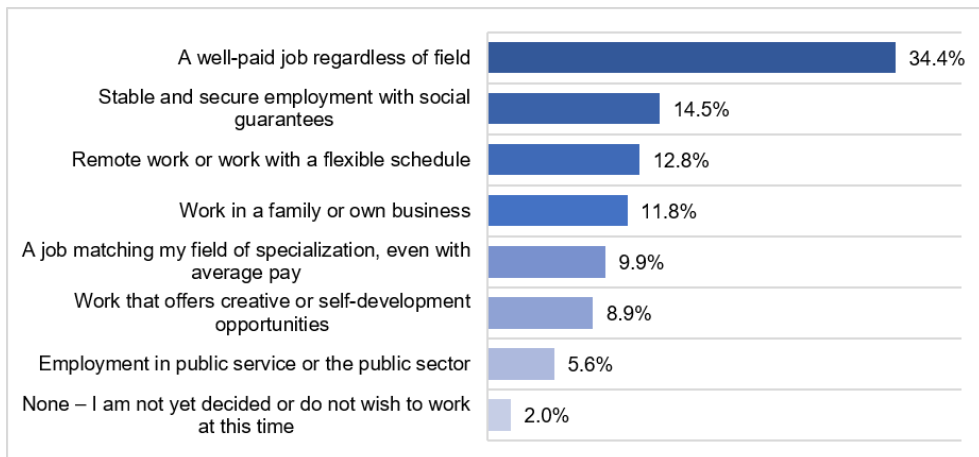


Figure 12. If you had the opportunity to choose, what type of work would you prefer to do in Armenia? (Ages 18–35, %)

In summary, youth employment trajectories in Armenia are dynamic and continuously reshaped rather than finalized through education. Nearly half of young people are employed, yet many plan to change jobs, and most work outside their field of specialization. Entry into the labor market typically occurs around age 19. Youth employment strategies can be broadly grouped into three logics: securing basic stability even outside one's profession, pursuing self-assertion through self-employment or multiple jobs, and seeking dignified and value-consistent work through ongoing mobility. These strategies reflect broader socio-economic uncertainty, structural labor market constraints, and rising expectations regarding both income and job quality.

Chapter 7. Young people's families, friends, and housing conditions

In the transition from childhood dependence to independence in youth, three key transitions play a central role: the transition from education to employment, the transition from the family of origin to a newly formed family (domestic transition), and the housing transition, involving moving out of the parental or guardian household and establishing independent living arrangements (housing transition).

It is not coincidental that youth studies examine these three transitions in close interconnection. Delays in the transition from education to employment often extend the period during which young people remain dependent on their families and, in some countries, on the state. Financial independence through employment provides young people with the resources needed to leave the parental home and establish more autonomous living arrangements.

Research also shows that young people's relationships outside the family - particularly with friends and romantic partners - can influence decisions related to transitional pathways. These relationships therefore constitute an important area of inquiry in youth studies.

Most young people live in households consisting of three to four members.

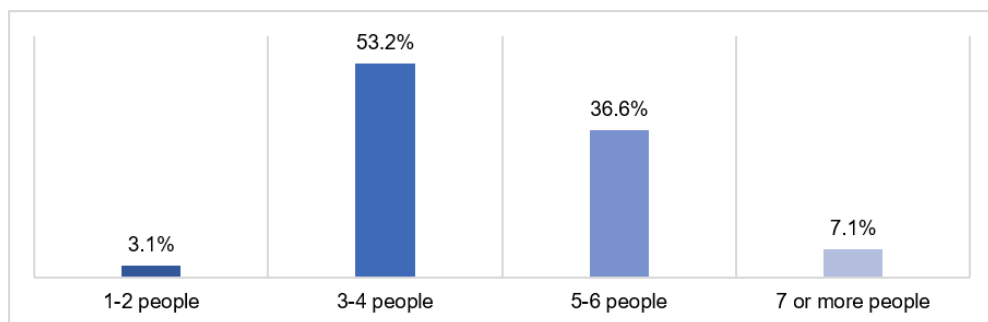


Figure 13. Number of household members among youth, ages 13 - 35, %

Young people generally prefer to make decisions independently, and only afterward turn to family members - most commonly parents and spouses or partners - for support.

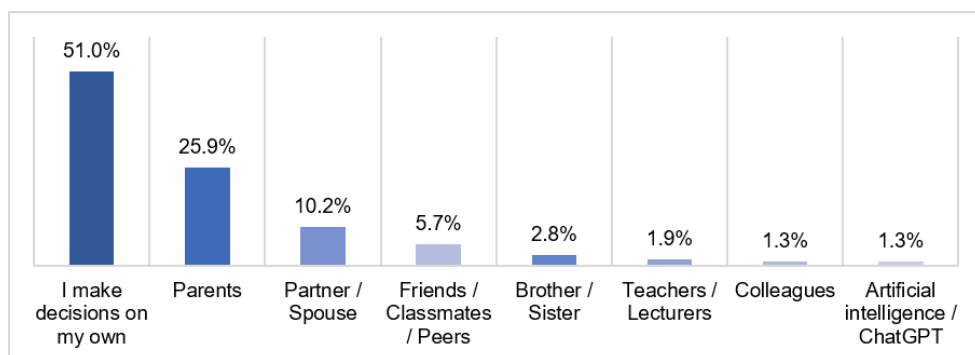


Figure 14. Whom do you turn to first in different life situations?

For young people, the family functions simultaneously as the primary source of security and psychological support, and as a factor that may limit the process of independence. A significant share of young people continues to live in the parental household not as a value-based choice, but due to housing constraints, financial insecurity, and a lack of viable alternatives. This dual role creates a persistent tension between dependence and autonomy. Approximately half of young people make decisions independently regarding education, employment, and personal matters. The remaining half tends to consult parents on educational issues, parents, partners, and friends on employment-related decisions, and again parents, partners, and friends on other personal matters.

Sixty-five percent of young people report being satisfied with their housing conditions, 20% are dissatisfied, and 15% are fully satisfied. Girls report lower levels of satisfaction with housing conditions than boys. Most young people do not wish to change their place of residence; however, girls express a greater desire to relocate compared to boys. The desire to change residence declines with age, with the highest willingness to move observed among those aged 18-22. This reflects a well-established sociological pattern whereby younger individuals are more mobile and open to change (life-course effect). A clear and statistically significant relationship exists between age and intention to relocate ($\chi^2(6)=35.3$, $p<.001$). Specifically, around 43% of those aged 18-22 indicate readiness to move ("yes" or "rather yes"), while among those aged 23-29 the dominant response is "rather no" (41%). Among youth aged 30-35, the desire to relocate is lowest, with 37% responding "no."

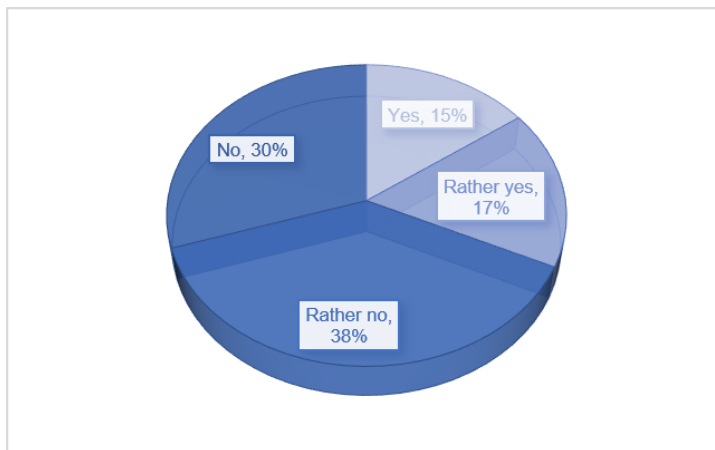


Figure 15. Do you want to change your place of residence? Ages 18-35, %

Smaller households are more inclined to relocate, while larger households are less so, although this trend is statistically weak ($p=.066$).

According to the findings, perceptions of changes in one's community or neighborhood over the past two years are directly associated with intentions to relocate ($\chi^2(9)=62.7$, $p<.001$). Young people who perceive a deterioration in their local environment are significantly more likely to express a desire to move (over 65% responding "yes" or "rather yes"). In contrast, those who perceive their community as improved or largely unchanged are more likely to prefer staying in place (41% "no," 27% "rather no"). Thus, deterioration of the social and physical environment strengthens migration intentions, while stability or improvement supports decisions to remain.

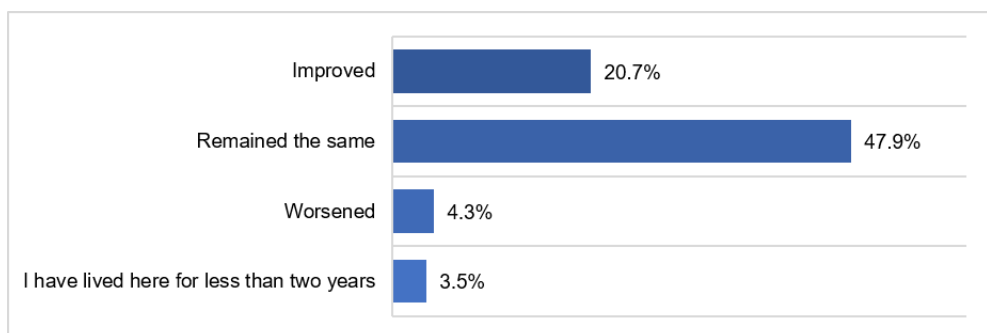


Figure 16. How has the overall condition of your community/neighborhood changed over the past two years? Ages 18-35, %

Around 10% of young people report plans to migrate permanently to another country. Such migration intentions are most pronounced among youth living in

Yerevan and among those aged 18-22. Migration intentions are also relatively higher among young people with bachelor's or master's degrees. Unmarried youth and girls are overrepresented among those expressing migration intentions. Notably, both low- and high-income groups are represented among youth planning to migrate. Young people living in smaller households are also more likely to plan permanent migration.

Half of young people do not wish to live separately from their family, around 16% express a desire to do so, and 9% find it difficult to answer.

Friendship and romantic relationships represent another important domain in young people's lives. Youth frequently note challenges in this sphere, particularly related to building mutual trust.

The model of relationships between boys and girls has changed a lot. In my case, fortunately, it's not like that now, but I've seen it happen. Many of my friends say that especially men often cannot clearly articulate what they want from women. I have many female friends where men appear, disappear, reappear, disappear again - or they are supposedly in a relationship but never define it. The girl doesn't understand whether this man is her boyfriend or what. And when she tries to clarify, the man keeps maneuvering and avoiding the issue.

Interview with a female blogger

Overall, the findings indicate that most young people in Armenia continue to live in their parental households, primarily in families of three to four members. While they value independence in decision-making, in practice they rely heavily on the support of parents, partners, and friends. This reflects the characteristic duality of the transition phase, combining aspirations for autonomy with continued dependence.

The family environment plays a dual role for young people. On the one hand, it serves as the main emotional and social support system, providing security, stability, and assistance. On the other hand, it can limit opportunities for independence. Many young people remain in the parental household not by choice, but due to high housing costs, socio-economic insecurity, and limited opportunities for independent living. In this context, co-residence with parents is often perceived as a necessary adaptive solution rather than a deliberate rejection of independence.

Assessments of housing conditions reveal gender differences, with higher dissatisfaction reported among girls, as well as a clear pattern in which increasing

age reduces willingness to relocate. Youth aged 18–22 are the most mobile, while preference for staying increases markedly among those aged 30–35. Perceived deterioration of the local social environment significantly increases intentions to move, indicating that youth migration intentions are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by structural conditions.

Migration intentions are most pronounced among younger, unmarried, highly educated, and urban youth, particularly in Yerevan. At the same time, more than half of young people do not wish to live separately from their family, indicating that aspirations for independence are often constrained by economic insecurity, housing challenges, and the need for social support. Access to independent housing is frequently determined not by employment outcomes, but by parental support, access to mortgage loans, or willingness to assume long-term financial obligations. This situation contributes to a sense of generational inequality and psychological pressure, as long-term financial commitments are perceived as restrictions on freedom and as deepening uncertainty about the future.

Friendship and romantic relationships also constitute a crucial component of young people's lives. Qualitative data point to issues of trust, unclear boundaries, and relational ambiguity, reflecting shifts in gender roles and the instability of contemporary relationship models. Undefined relationships, uncertainty, and avoidance of responsibility are perceived by young people as sources of emotional insecurity. The role of friends extends beyond emotional support; friends often form pragmatic networks of mutual assistance through the exchange of work opportunities, services, information, and small resources. These social ties help sustain feelings of security, trust, and stability, especially for young people navigating uncertain stages of independence.

Overall, the study shows that transitions to independence among young people in Armenia are non-linear, often fragmented, and contradictory. Aspirations for independence, migration intentions, continued reliance on family, and uncertainties in relationships create a social reality in which future-oriented choices are shaped not only by individual desires, but also by structural constraints, economic insecurity, and pervasive uncertainty.

Chapter 8. Youth civic and political participation

Research on the relationship between youth and politics is generally dominated by two common perspectives. First, young people are often viewed as being disengaged from traditional forms of political participation, such as party membership and electoral participation. Second, young people are believed to prefer non-traditional forms of political and civic engagement, including volunteering, participation in protests, practices of silence or disengagement, and digital participation. However, the methodologies commonly used in youth studies are often insufficiently sensitive to these forms of participation. As a result, young people's experiences of engagement frequently remain partially or entirely invisible.

In contemporary societies, greater importance is increasingly placed on "life politics" (or lifestyle politics) as opposed to "emancipatory politics," which was characteristic of more traditional societies. **Emancipatory politics** refers to struggles for liberation, the expansion of social rights, and collective issues. **Life politics**, according to Giddens, is "a politics of self-actualization under conditions of reflexively organized life." In this sense, political issues today are often closely connected to identity formation, personal choices, and lifestyle construction. These processes link individuals to the social and political world **indirectly**, without mediation through traditional social groups such as political parties or unions. Forms of political participation thus become increasingly **individualized** - often described as "**atomized citizenship**" - and young people enter the political sphere not through collective affiliations but as individuals shaping their own identities. Nevertheless, life politics and emancipatory politics remain closely interconnected: political movements may simultaneously engage in reducing global risks while also defending the right to develop alternative lifestyles.

According to the survey results, 57% of young people reported that they believe they can influence decision-making processes on issues important to their community, while only 26% believe they can influence decisions at the national level. In other words, 74% do not agree with the statement that they can influence decisions of national importance. At the same time, there is a clear issue related to the legitimization of "youth voice." Many young people describe their participation as secondary or symbolic, lacking real influence over decision-making. Rather than producing open confrontation, this perception fosters a strategy of withdrawal, in which young people focus on acting within their own immediate spheres while lowering expectations toward state or political institutions. Among young people of voting age, nearly one third reported that

they would participate in local self-government elections, and a slightly smaller share would participate in parliamentary elections. Approximately 10% found it difficult to answer this question.

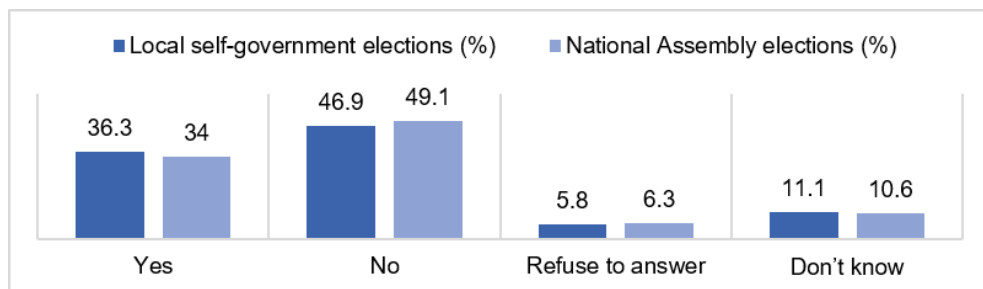


Figure 17. If local self-government and parliamentary elections were held next Sunday, would you participate? (18-35, %)

The majority of young people are not members of any organization. Among those who are members of civil society organizations, girls and young people aged 13 - 22 are overrepresented. At the same time, non-membership should not automatically be interpreted as passivity. Many young people consciously avoid formal membership, associating it with formality, limited influence, or lack of transparency and accountability. Instead, civic participation is often expressed through practical actions, such as joining community initiatives, addressing specific problems, or supporting local processes without institutional obligations.

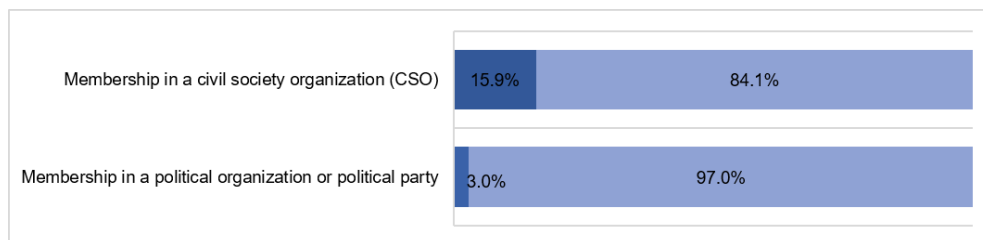


Figure 18. Membership in organizations (13 - 35, %)

An overwhelming majority of young people report being interested in socio-political events in Armenia (76%) and globally (64%). Among other indicators of civic participation, volunteering shows relatively high levels of engagement, while participation in civic movements remains the lowest. Girls demonstrate higher participation rates in several forms of civic engagement, including volunteering, donations, and participation in charitable events. By age group, participation in volunteering, charitable activities, and community public discussions and meetings is highest among young people aged 18-22.

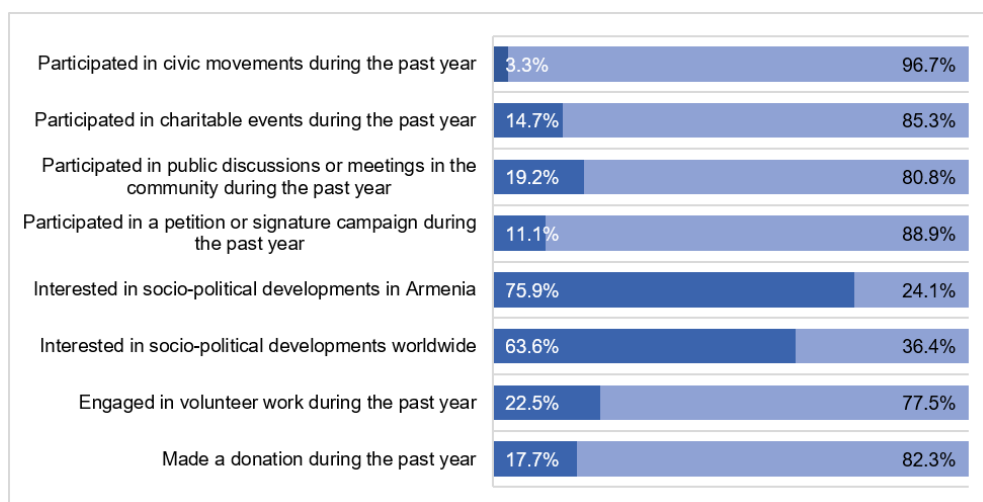


Figure 19. Have you (are you)... (18 - 35, %)

In practice, young people are interested in socio-political developments in Armenia but do not assume an active role or seek deeper political engagement. One of the most frequently cited reasons is the prevalence of hate speech in the political sphere. During FGDs, participants also described politics as a high-risk field, where substantial effort may not lead to tangible results.

The limitations on youth civic and political participation often emerge at much earlier stages, beginning within the education system. According to some participants, school environments not only fail to encourage initiative, independent opinion formation, and public responsibility, but in some cases actively suppress them. This creates a situation in which young people learn to avoid initiative, responsibility, and public expression before they ever enter the political or civic sphere. As a result, political passivity is shaped not only by distrust or perceptions of risk, but also by behavioral constraints formed during socialization.

Qualitative findings also reveal an alternative logic of participation, where “change” is understood not as entering formal politics, but as exerting influence through one’s professional, community, or social activities. Political engagement is often perceived as a high-risk domain characterized by constant delegitimization, hate speech, and uncertainty of outcomes. Consequently, many young people prefer to “do their own work,” maintaining a sense of control and dignity. For others, participation is primarily understood as responsible service within the state system, adherence to the law, and addressing everyday community problems. In this interpretation, civic engagement is expressed not through public

positioning or political struggle, but through an ethic of “doing one’s job properly,” where accountability, responsibility, and equal application of the law are seen as the primary forms of public contribution.

Sources of Information

Young people primarily rely on social media, family members, friends, and television as sources of information.

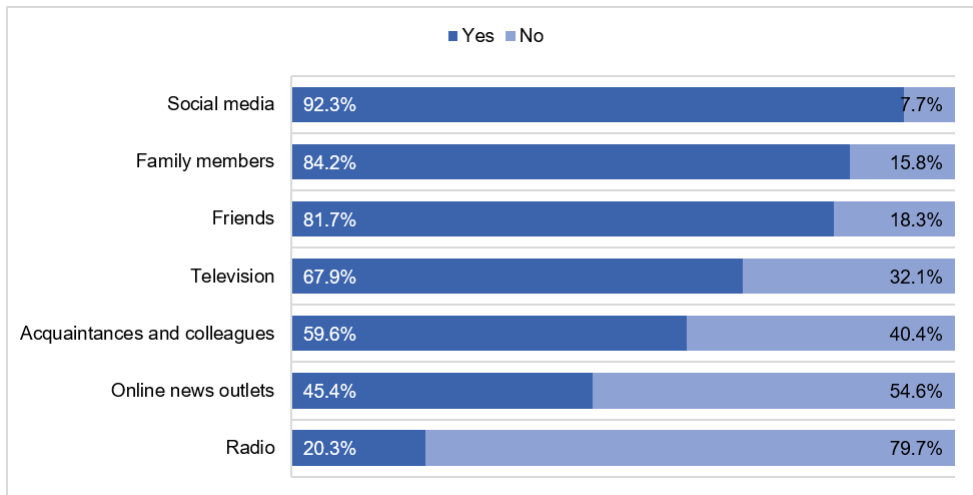


Figure 20. Do you use the following sources of information? (18 - 35, %)

Levels of trust in these sources vary. For most young people, family members, friends, and colleagues are considered the most trustworthy sources of information, while trust in social media and television is comparatively lower.

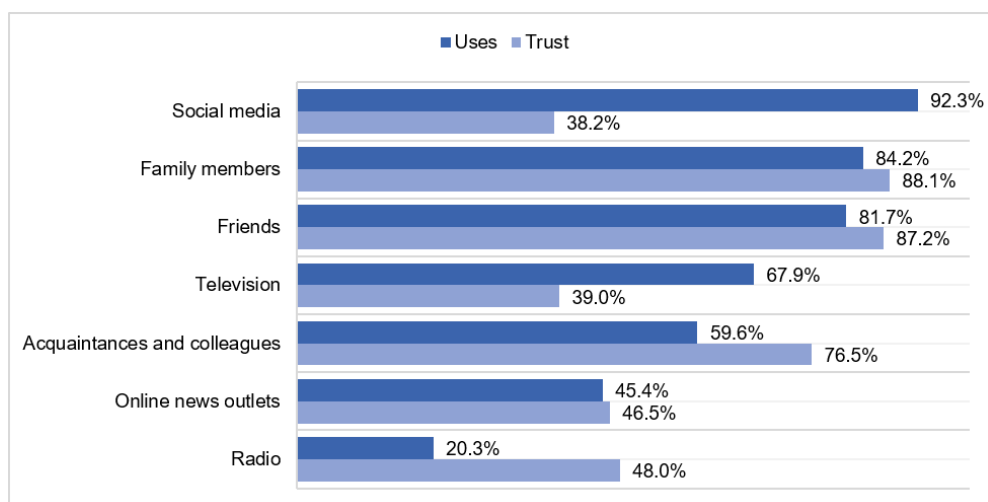


Figure 21. Trust in information sources

According to young people, the digital environment represents an accessible but limited platform for civic participation. Social media, live broadcasts, and public expression enable individuals to articulate positions and respond to events; however, many young people do not associate this form of participation with “real impact.” As a result, a form of engagement emerges in which being informed and holding an opinion does not necessarily translate into physical or organized participation.

In summary, youth civic and political participation in Armenia today is characterized by a significant gap between interest and the perceived ability to exert real influence. While most young people believe they can affect decisions at the community level, far fewer express confidence in their ability to influence national-level decision-making. Data on institutional forms of political participation indicate a relatively moderate willingness to participate in elections. Nearly one third of eligible young voters express readiness to participate in local and parliamentary elections, which may reflect both distrust and political uncertainty. Most young people are not members of any organization; however, among civil society organization members, girls and young people aged 13–22 are predominant, highlighting gender- and age-based differentiation in civic engagement.

Despite limited institutional political participation, the vast majority of young people are interested in socio-political developments both in Armenia and globally. Volunteering emerges as the most common form of civic engagement, while participation in civic movements remains the least prevalent. Girls are

comparatively more active in several forms of civic participation, particularly volunteering, donations, and charitable activities. By age group, the highest levels of activity are observed among 18 - 22-year-olds, especially in volunteering, charity events, and community public discussions and meetings.

Overall, the findings suggest that young people are engaged with socio-political processes but avoid deeper political involvement. Key barriers include the presence of hate speech in the political arena and the perception of politics as a high-risk field, where the investment of effort does not reliably lead to desired outcomes. These factors significantly constrain young people's willingness to assume more active roles in political life.

Chapter 9. Youth health and well-being

Young people are often perceived as a demographic group at the peak of physical health and capacity. Physical strength, energy, and endurance traditionally characterize youth as a life stage of vitality. At the same time, adolescence and youth are the periods during which individuals begin to consciously take responsibility for their own health by recognizing health needs, shaping lifestyle habits, and learning to reduce risky behaviors.

Contemporary youth studies, however, indicate that young people's health has gradually worsened over time. Several interconnected processes contribute to this trend. A sedentary lifestyle has become increasingly common, with young people spending more time in front of screens and less time engaging in physical activity or sports. The spread of fast food, combined with physical inactivity, has contributed to rising rates of overweight and obesity. Mental health deterioration is linked to prolonged uncertainty, delayed transitions from education to employment, the COVID-19 pandemic, global and regional conflicts, and post-war conditions. These factors have led to increased anxiety, stress, insecurity, self-doubt, and depressive symptoms, which in some cases also result in self-harm and the spread of harmful coping practices. Growing individualization and personal responsibility further weaken social ties and support networks, increasing loneliness and reducing resilience. In parallel, declining well-being is reinforced by materialistic value systems that promote consumption and economic success while neglecting psychological consequences, fostering dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and social alienation.

Self-rated health status

Most respondents assessed their health as good or very good. A total of 17.7% evaluated their health as satisfactory, while only 1.7% rated it as poor or very poor. Income is strongly associated with health self-assessment: young people with lower incomes more often report satisfactory or good health, whereas those with higher incomes predominantly report good or very good health. The association between income level and self-rated health is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 42.2$, $p < .001$).

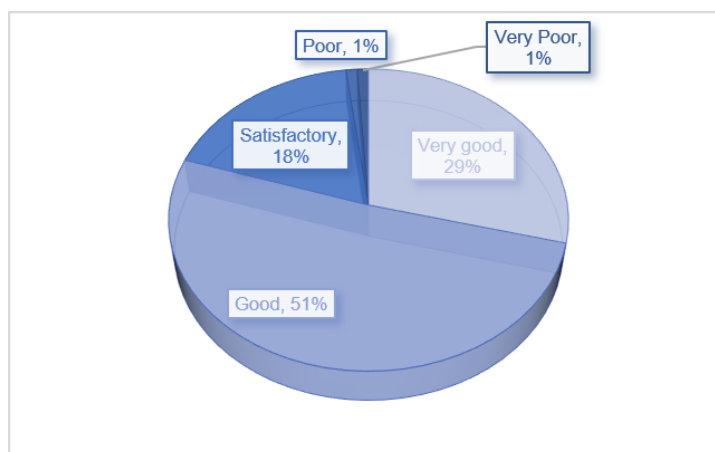


Figure 22. Self-rated health status, ages 13 - 35, %

Physical health

Around 41% of young people report rarely engaging in physical activity or not exercising at all. Clear patterns emerge: physically active youth consistently report higher health self-assessments, while less active youth report lower levels of perceived health. This relationship is confirmed both by frequency distributions and chi-square tests. Low physical activity is more common among young people with lower incomes, women, and those aged 30–35. No significant gender or age differences are observed among youth who exercise frequently.

Mental health

The most commonly reported emotional states among young people are joy, fatigue, and weakness, while sadness, excitement, and anger are reported less frequently. Distinct age-related emotional profiles are observed: youth aged 30–35 more often report fatigue and weakness, whereas those aged 18–22 more frequently report fear and uncertainty.

Overall, the majority of young people demonstrate a positive emotional state. The calculated mean mental well-being score is 0.45, indicating that positive emotions outweigh negative ones on average. The median score is 0.50, and the confidence interval (0.39 - 0.51) confirms an above-average level of mental well-being. At the same time, the relatively high standard deviation (0.78) and wide range of values (–1.93 to 2.86) point to substantial individual variation. The near-normal distribution (skewness –0.19, kurtosis 0.18) allows for robust comparative and regression analyses. These results indicate that while most young people report

adequate or positive mental well-being, smaller groups experience either very low or very high well-being.

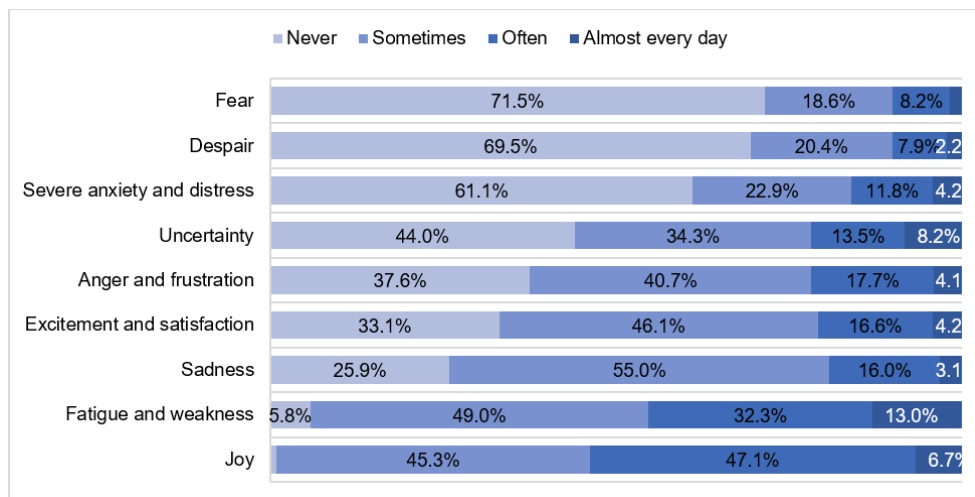


Figure 23. Frequency of emotional experiences during the past month, ages 18 - 35, %

Gender differences are evident: young men report higher average mental well-being and greater stability, while young women show lower average well-being and higher variability (Std. Dev. = 0.86). Negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety, and fatigue are more frequently reported by women. Mental well-being levels are similar in Yerevan and rural areas, while somewhat higher averages are observed in regional towns.

Qualitative data highlight widespread fear, anxiety, and stress linked to multiple role demands, financial pressure, housing uncertainty, and post-war experiences. Young mothers, in particular, describe sustained psychological strain associated with increased responsibility and limited opportunities for rest. For some youth, stress accumulates over time due to ongoing socioeconomic pressures rather than single events. Many participants acknowledge a lack of clear coping mechanisms, pointing to limited access to psychological support services. Others rely on individual strategies such as work immersion, reading, information avoidance, or family support. These coping mechanisms are largely informal and individualized, often substituting for institutional psychological support while creating risks of burnout and long-term emotional exhaustion.

Healthcare services

A total of 61% of young people report satisfaction with the quality of healthcare services available in their community, while 31% are dissatisfied and 8% are completely dissatisfied. Satisfaction is highest in Yerevan (80%), followed by Kotayk and Lori (around 67%), and lowest in Shirak, Syunik, and Gegharkunik. Qualitative findings emphasize limited access to quality healthcare in border and rural communities, where the absence of essential medical services can pose serious risks.

Youth well-being and quality of life

Most young people report satisfaction with their overall quality of life. The most common rating is 7 on a 1 - 10 scale. Very few respondents report complete dissatisfaction (1 point: 0.1%), while a small share report very high satisfaction (10 points: 5.5%). Distribution across categories is as follows: 1 - 3 (very low satisfaction) – 1.8%; 4 - 6 (below average) – 16.0%; 7 - 8 (above average) – 69.5%; 9 - 10 (very high) – 12.7%. No significant gender differences are observed, while higher satisfaction is reported among youth aged 13 - 17 and 23 - 29.

A shift in value orientations toward well-being is evident. Many young people critically assess consumerist and material success models, associating them with debt, social pressure, and psychological imbalance. Well-being is increasingly understood in terms of inner stability, self-regulation, and responsibility rather than external status or consumption.

Most households are able to cover basic needs such as utilities, food, and medication. Non-essential expenditures - especially leisure travel, cultural activities, and dining out - are more limited. Monthly household expenditure is most strongly correlated with the ability to afford leisure travel ($r = .194$), while weaker correlations exist for food, clothing, heating, and cultural expenses. Higher household spending primarily translates into non-essential consumption, while basic needs are met across income levels.

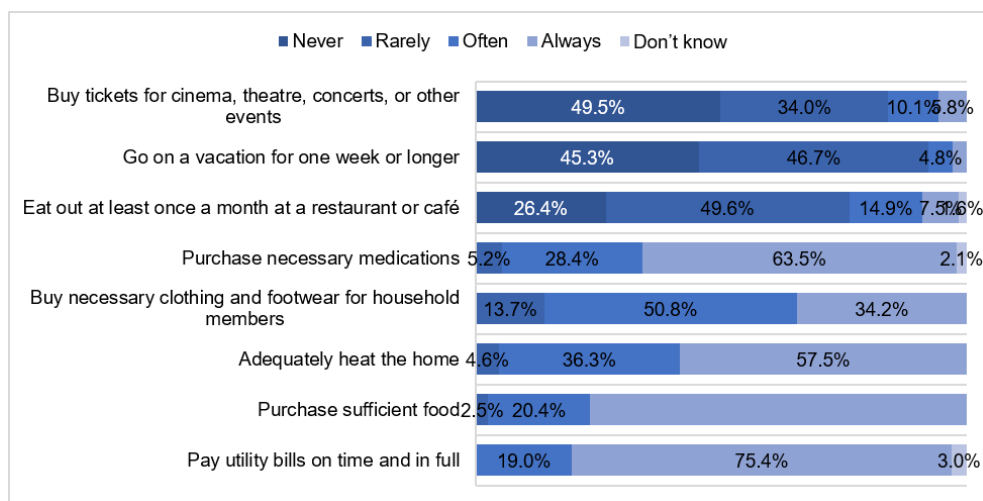


Figure 24. Frequency with which household members were able to afford selected expenditures in the past 12 months

Spearman correlations show that household size has a weak but statistically significant negative association with non-essential expenditures such as eating out ($r = -.113$, $p = .002$) and leisure travel ($r = -.080$, $p = .030$), while no meaningful association is observed with basic needs.

Overall, youth health and well-being in Armenia are shaped by intersecting pressures related to socioeconomic inequality, post-war experiences, uncertainty, sedentary lifestyles, mental health challenges, and limited institutional support. While most young people maintain relatively positive self-assessments of health and quality of life, the findings reveal underlying vulnerabilities, accumulated stress, and increasing reliance on individual and family resources rather than systemic support. These patterns highlight the importance of addressing youth health and well-being as a matter of social justice, public policy, and post-conflict recovery, rather than solely individual responsibility.

Chapter 10. Youth leisure

In youth studies, two main research traditions are commonly distinguished: the cultural and the transitional approaches. Cultural approaches focus on youth subcultures, leisure practices, lifestyles, and fashion, while transitional perspectives emphasize life-course dynamics shaped by education, labor market entry, and dependency. Over recent decades, prolonged educational pathways, delayed labor market transitions, and extended periods of semi-dependence have significantly reshaped young people's lifestyles and the organization of their free time. Although leisure practices continue to reflect certain gender and social status differences, research indicates that these distinctions have softened over time due to the expansion of leisure industries and the shared experience of delayed life transitions. As a result, young people remain longer within peer environments, which strongly shape their lifestyles, social affiliations, and consumption patterns.

Youth leisure preferences are influenced by local and national cultural norms as well as by the rapid development of digital technologies. Daily schedules are primarily structured around the fulfillment of core roles - education, employment, or childcare - while leisure time is organized around the remaining available time.

For most young people, leisure is not an independently planned domain but emerges after primary obligations related to study, work, and family are fulfilled. Many describe their daily routines as "full" or "dense," where free time is perceived less as a resource and more as a short pause between functional responsibilities. This contributes to a pragmatic understanding of leisure, used mainly for recovery or mental disengagement rather than for creativity or self-expression. For some young people, avoiding free time altogether becomes a conscious strategy, as unstructured time may intensify reflection and anxiety.

I plan my day so that I don't have a single free minute, so my mind is always occupied.

Excerpt from a FGD with working students

Parenthood leads to a sharp transformation of leisure practices. Childcare not only reduces available free time but also alters its rhythm and content, shifting leisure into the domestic sphere and integrating it with caregiving and household activities. In this context, leisure becomes primarily functional, aimed at physical and psychological recovery, rather than social interaction or self-expression. Social

interaction and digital activities dominate young people’s leisure time. The most common activity is spending time with friends, followed by using social media and listening to music. Activities related to family responsibilities also occupy a notable place.

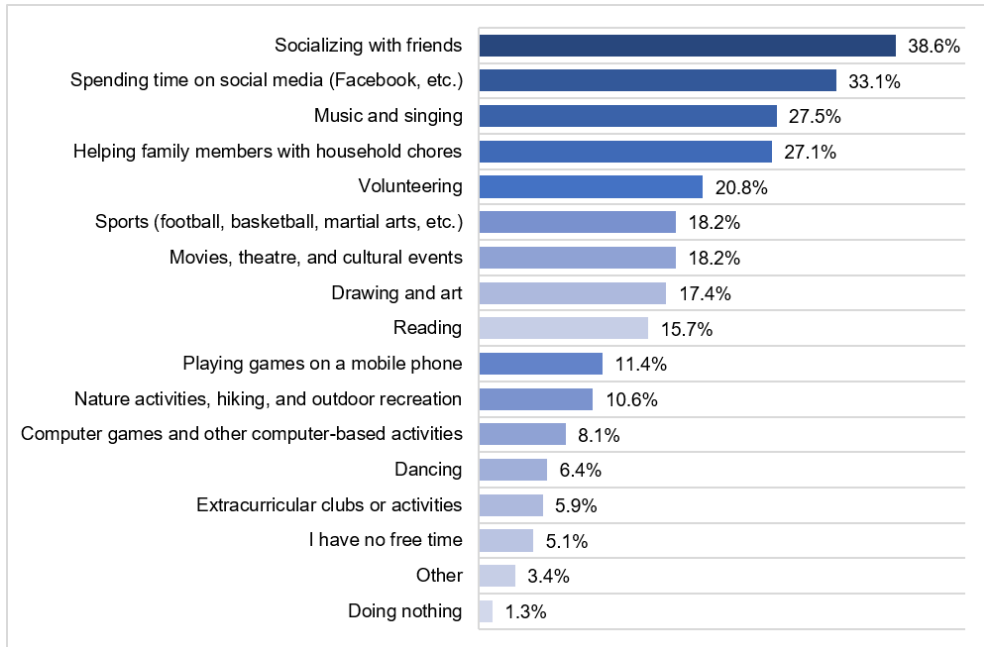


Figure 25. What do you mainly prefer to do in your free time, % of respondents (multiple responses allowed)

Everyday leisure is largely centered on social interaction and digital engagement. Spending time with friends and family, using social media, and watching films or videos are activities that most young people engage in frequently or constantly (Figure 26). Social media functions not only as a leisure tool but also as a substitute for limited physical socialization and public spaces. Digital platforms allow young people to maintain social ties, follow cultural processes, and experience a sense of involvement despite time, financial, or spatial constraints. In this sense, social media operates as a hybrid space for leisure, social connection, and identity formation.

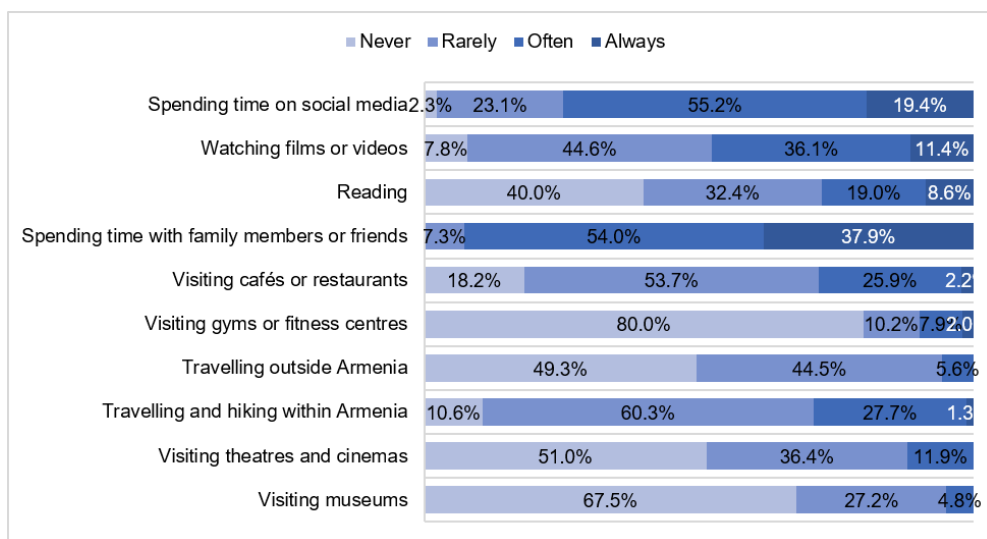


Figure 26. How do you usually spend your free time?

Most young people spend 1 - 2 hours per day on social media. Men are more likely to spend up to 2 hours, while women more often report spending 2 - 3 hours or more than 3 hours daily. Spending more than 3 hours per day is most common among 18 - 22-year-olds, students, and unmarried youth, whereas spending 1 - 2 hours is more typical among those aged 30 - 35.

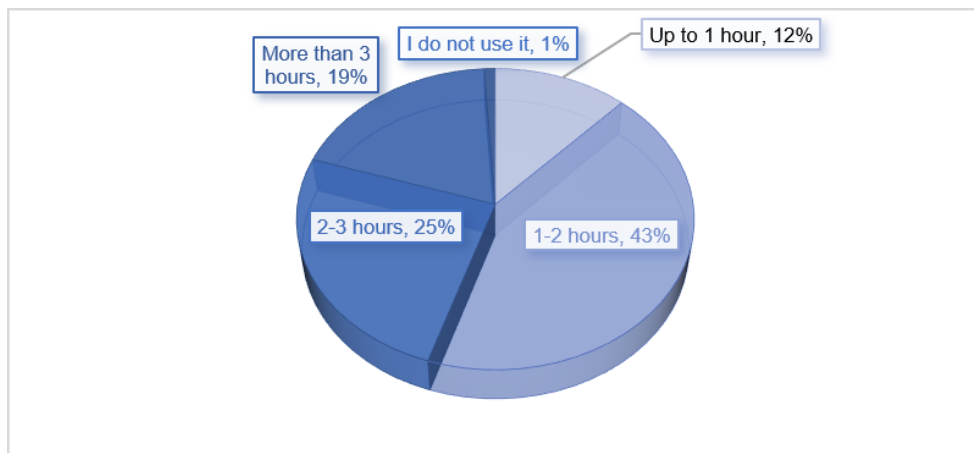


Figure 27. On average, how many hours per day do you spend on social media (YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, etc.)?

Youth engagement in the digital environment in Armenia is extremely high and concentrated around several key platforms. YouTube is the most widely used platform, followed by Facebook and Instagram. More than half of young people already use artificial intelligence tools (e.g., ChatGPT), as well as Telegram and TikTok, reflecting the rapid evolution of digital practices and the active integration of new technologies into everyday life.

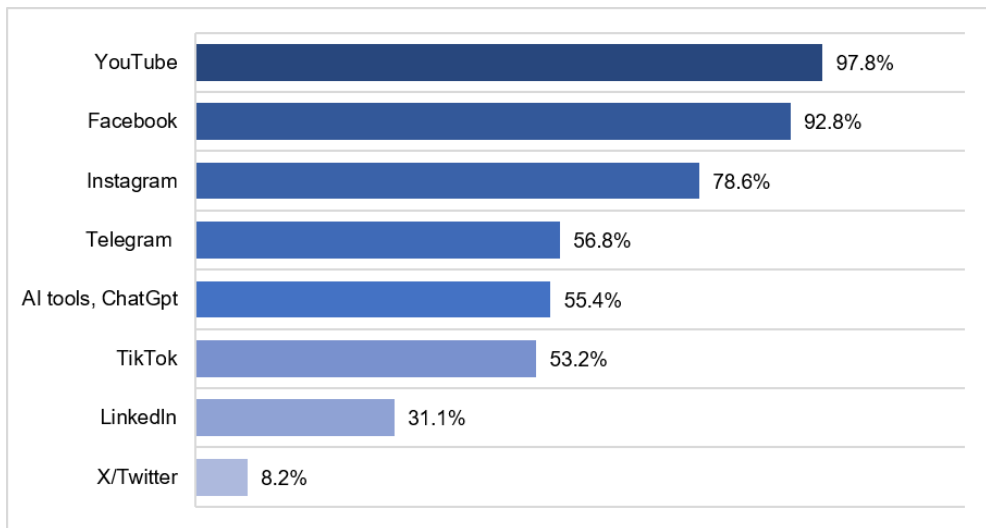


Figure 28. Do you use the following platforms and tools, 18-35, %

If financial resources were sufficient, most young people would prefer to travel more within Armenia and abroad. Other priorities include spending time in leisure venues and engaging in sports. A notable share of young people also express a desire to learn new skills during their free time.

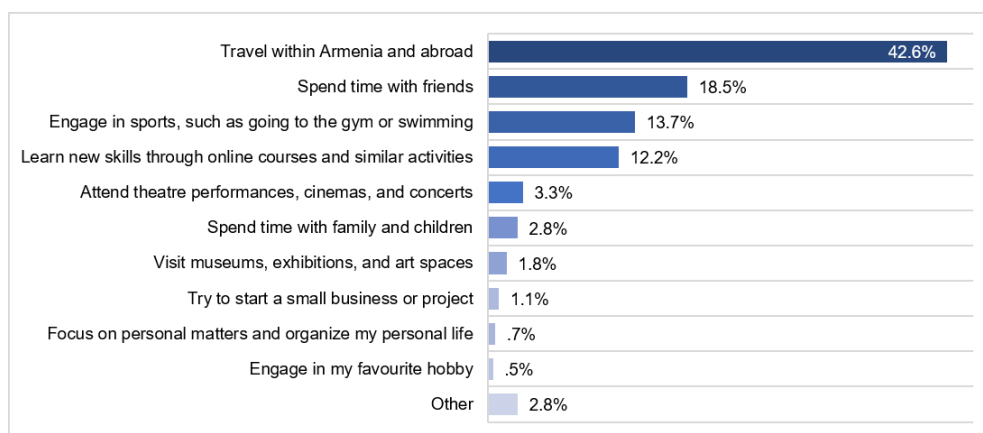


Figure 29. If you had sufficient financial resources, how would you manage your free time?

Preferred new skills combine cultural, educational, and market-oriented directions. Young people most often mention learning foreign languages, playing musical instruments, acquiring media and entrepreneurial skills. Digital and creative skills - such as video editing, blogging, graphic design, programming, and data science - are also prominent, indicating that leisure is often linked to future professionalization, self-expression, and potential income generation.

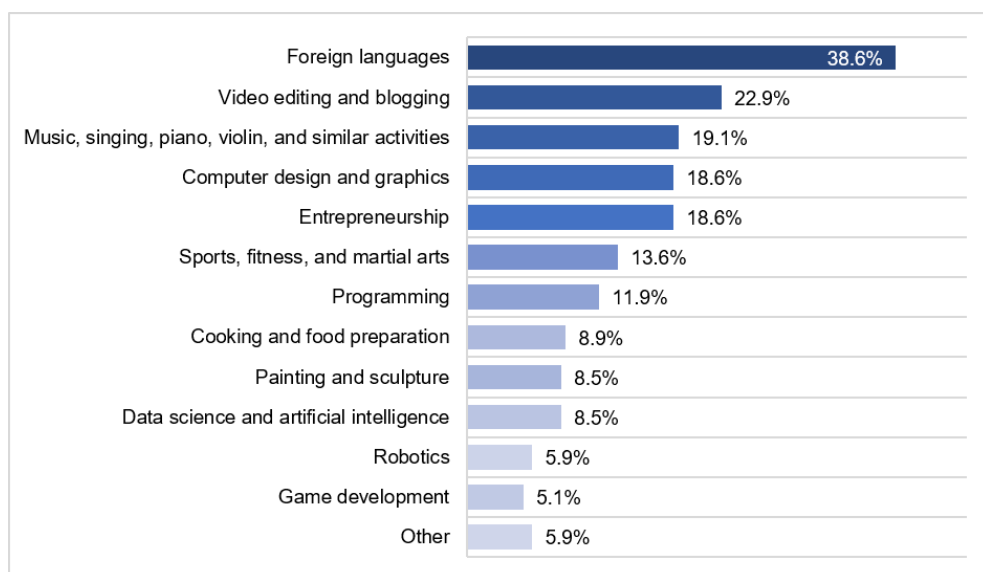


Figure 30. If you had the opportunity to learn something new, what would you learn?

In summary, youth leisure practices in Armenia are shaped by global trends, local cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, and life-course dynamics. Education and work occupy a central place in daily routines, while leisure is organized on a secondary basis. Nevertheless, free time remains an important space for social interaction, psychological recovery, and identity formation.

The findings show that young people's leisure primarily centers on social interaction, digital engagement, music, and family-related activities, combining peer relations with family responsibilities. Social media occupies a central role as a space for leisure, socialization, and belonging. At the same time, leisure preferences are strongly conditioned by economic resources. With greater financial capacity, young people would invest more in travel, sport, leisure activities, and self-development. The emphasis on learning new skills highlights the instrumental and future-oriented nature of youth leisure.

Overall, youth leisure practices in Armenia reflect delayed transitions, prolonged semi-dependence, and increasing individual responsibility. Leisure functions not only as rest, but as a key mechanism of social adaptation, resilience, and identity construction.

Chapter 11. Youth and war

For a long time, conflict, war, and security were not considered central research areas in youth studies, either in their early stages or in later theoretical developments. One of the first documented reports addressing the impact of war and armed conflict on children and young people was the report by Graça Machel (1996).

In recent years, a growing body of youth research has begun to examine the effects of conflict situations on the lives and security of children and young people, demonstrating that war and armed conflict influence educational outcomes, peer relationships, and overall life satisfaction. Longitudinal studies further confirm that conflict exposure and post-conflict environments have a negative impact on the mental health of children and youth. The most common mental health disorders identified among those exposed to war and conflict include post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, acute stress reactions, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, panic disorders, and sleep disturbances. Post-war youth studies highlight several key structural challenges, including:

- the crisis of the traditional family institution (loss of family members, an increase in single mothers and homeless children),
- changes in the structure and composition of society (the emergence of war participants as a distinct social group),
- the intensification of socio-economic problems (housing insecurity, unemployment, health issues, mental health deterioration),
- an increased sense of freedom and personal responsibility toward oneself and one's immediate social group,
- tendencies toward silence and disengagement from "warring adults" among young people.

In 2020, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale war against Armenia and Artsakh, lasting 44 days and commonly referred to as the 44-Day War. In 2023, renewed developments surrounding the Artsakh conflict further intensified social tensions, resulting in the forced displacement of the entire indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh - over 120,000 people - to Armenia. The 44-Day War had a multilayered impact on young people's lives, simultaneously undermining security, deepening trauma, and fostering resilience, heightened responsibility, and new forms of social bonding.

War as biographical disruption: the breakdown of transitional pathways

Most young people participating in the study did not take part in the war directly. Some participated as conscripts or volunteers, others lived in Artsakh during the war, while approximately one third were indirectly involved through volunteering in the rear or providing financial or material support.

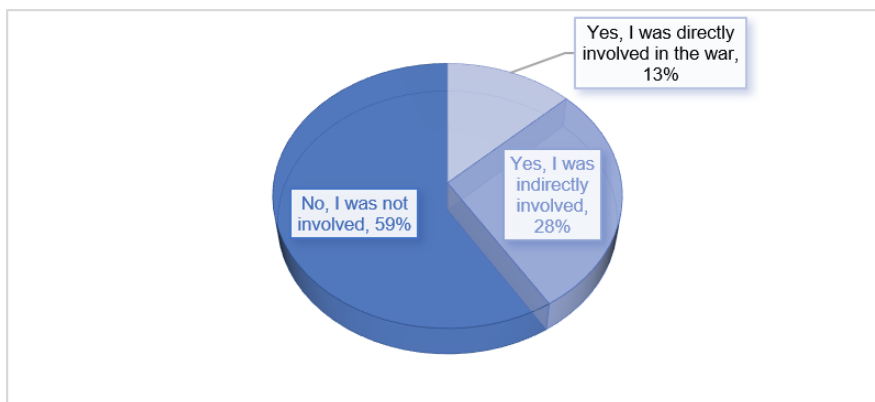


Figure 31. Did you participate in the Artsakh war that began in September 2020?

War is perceived by young people not merely as a political or military event, but as a profound biographical rupture. Participants frequently refer to life being divided into “before” and “after” the war, underscoring its role as a biographical disruption. The war coincided with particularly sensitive life stages - grades 9-11, graduation exams, university entrance, pre-conscription periods, first year of university, and phases of active identity formation. As a result, normative transitions such as education, career choice, and the process of becoming independent occurred under conditions of disruption, uncertainty, and heightened stress.

These crisis interventions fractured the previously assumed “linear” model of youth transitions, producing delayed, fragmented, or contradictory pathways often described by participants as “growing up too fast,” “maturing early,” or “losing childhood.” This effect was compounded by the preceding COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions.

Importantly, the depth of war’s impact is not limited to direct participation. Even those who were not on the front line experienced the war as a profound biographical rupture through prolonged waiting, anxiety, information overload, and constant concern for loved ones’ safety. War thus emerges as a shared

generational experience that permeates youth biographies in different but comparably deep ways.

War has also altered young people's subjective experience of time. Qualitative data reveal a recurring sense of "time compression," where the future is no longer perceived as something gradually constructed but as an urgent, fragile horizon. This intensifies pressure on young people to make rapid decisions regarding education, work, or family without the opportunity for full reflection.

Emotional landscape: collective trauma and background insecurity

Young people's narratives reveal a deeply traumatic emotional field characterized by fear of loss, guilt, injustice, and a persistent background of stress. These fears extend beyond the loss of specific individuals to encompass territory and homeland, reflecting a broader existential insecurity. Participants frequently express survivor's guilt - a sense of guilt for remaining alive or attempting to live fully in the presence of wounded or fallen peers.

A strong sense of violated justice is also evident, particularly when young people compare their experiences with those of peers in other countries. This comparison reinforces a feeling of "forced maturity," further intensifying internal tension. For those who participated in the war, the experience is not perceived as a closed chapter but as a continuous present, reproduced through news consumption, sounds, bodily sensations, and everyday safety practices such as keeping documents ready or remaining constantly alert.

These dynamics indicate that war has functioned as a source of collective trauma, whose consequences persist in everyday life in the form of background stress, anticipation of danger, and uncertainty about the future.

Distrust in institutions and the future

Institutional distrust emerges as a particularly strong theme in the research. While participants often avoid explicit political statements, their narratives clearly express mistrust toward the state, systems, decision-making processes, and the predictability of the future. Phrases such as "you don't know what to believe," "there's nothing to rally around," and "nothing moves forward" reflect deep frustration and uncertainty.

This distrust extends beyond politics into everyday life planning. Participants report difficulty formulating long-term goals due to shifting rules, security instability, and unclear “rules of the game.” As a result, short-term thinking - “living for today” - becomes dominant, limiting long-term educational, professional, and social investments. For displaced youth from Artsakh, future planning is particularly constrained by instability across all life domains, leading decisions to be guided not by ideal aspirations but by the pursuit of minimal stability.

Most young people report declining trust in government and official information sources since the war, alongside reduced confidence in the future and diminished emotional stability.

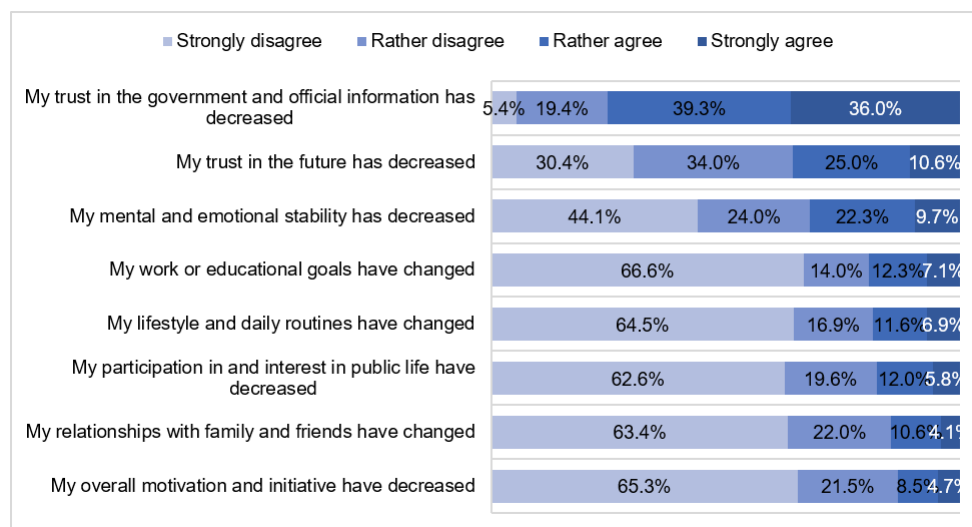


Figure 32. To what extent do you agree that the 2020 war and subsequent events have affected different aspects of your life?

Security for young people is no longer understood solely in physical or territorial terms, but increasingly as existential security - predictable life trajectories, stable employment, a meaningful future, and a controllable environment. Even in formally secure contexts, internal safety may remain absent due to disrupted continuity and planning horizons.

Crisis of Hope and Blocked Futures

Young people frequently describe difficulty imagining the future - not simply uncertainty, but an inability to “see” or “envision” it at all. This reflects a condition

of blocked futures, where social conditions undermine the feasibility of biographical projects.

Migration is often framed not as a desire but as a feared necessity - the fear of being forced to leave rather than freely choosing to do so. This erodes young people's sense of agency, replacing choice with fatalism. For displaced youth from Artsakh, mobility remains a constantly open option, both within Armenia and abroad, as stability has not yet been restored. Decisions about staying or leaving are marked by deep ambivalence between safety and belonging.

Dual Dynamics of Action: Responsibility and Powerlessness

On one hand, war and the post-war context have strengthened young people's sense of responsibility and ethical engagement, particularly in relation to professions seen as socially necessary - diplomacy, science, defense. On the other hand, many express profound powerlessness: "as an individual I can't change anything," "my efforts were meaningless," "there is no result." This tension highlights structural constraints that limit the effectiveness of youth agency.

Rather than passive, young people are often disillusioned by failed action. As a response, many adopt a strategy of focusing on "narrow fields of influence" - family, work, professional or small community settings - where impact feels visible and controllable. For displaced youth, this strategy often becomes a form of self-preservation, centered on maintaining daily routines, continuing work or studies, and supporting family members.

From Civic Engagement to Burnout

Young people in the study describe earlier involvement in student bodies, academic activities, and volunteering. Over time, many withdrew because their efforts did not lead to visible results. This process is marked by fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of meaninglessness. These experiences can be described as social burnout. In this context, disengagement reflects a protective psychological and social response rather than apathy.

Among displaced youth, burnout is often intensified by prolonged material and emotional strain. When life remains in "recovery mode" for extended periods, even minor setbacks can deepen exhaustion and helplessness. Silence and withdrawal thus become strategies for regaining strength rather than expressions of indifference.

The Complexity of “Indifference”

Young people offer conflicting interpretations of youth “indifference,” variously attributing it to ignorance, disappointment, fear, or powerlessness. This plurality reveals that indifference is not a homogeneous condition but a label covering diverse states of emotional overload and protective disengagement. In post-war societies, silence often represents an active strategy of regaining control - setting boundaries of involvement, reducing emotional overload, and preserving inner balance.

Staying in Armenia as a Form of Hope and Resistance

Despite pervasive uncertainty, some survey participants articulate a conscious decision to remain in Armenia as a value-driven stance. Here, hope functions not as optimism but as an ethical choice and a form of resistance. “Hope in staying” combines belonging, responsibility, and social engagement in opposition to fear and instability. Most young people agree that Armenia is a safe country and feel secure in their communities, although nearly one third disagree with this assessment.

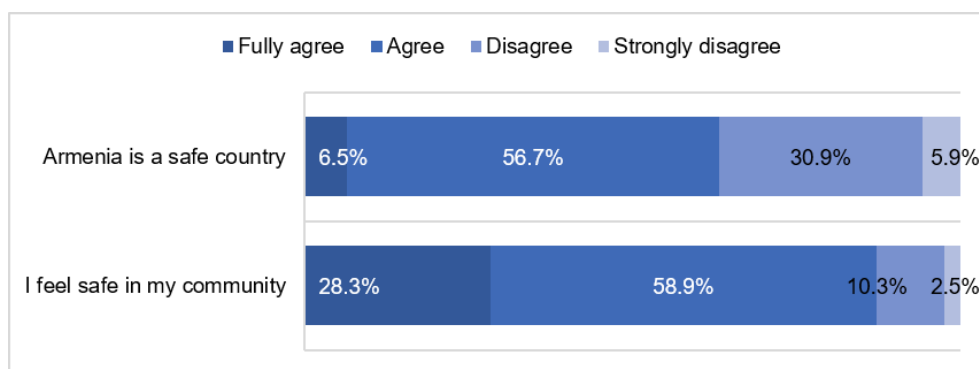


Figure 33. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Coping with post-war stress relies primarily on family, children, community ties, peers, and informal support networks, while institutional support is widely perceived as insufficient. Post-war resilience does not signify recovery or normalization, but rather an ongoing awareness of living under conditions of uncertainty - where strength and vulnerability coexist.

In post-war Armenia, youth hope and trust exist in a fragile and contradictory state. War has disrupted biographical transitions, deepened insecurity, eroded institutional trust, and narrowed future horizons. At the same time, it has fostered moral responsibility, a sense of belonging, and readiness to contribute. Young

people attempt to act within a constrained environment, often encountering structural barriers that transform engagement into disappointment. In this context, hope should be understood not as a psychological disposition, but as a socially conditioned, politically charged, and morally demanding practice.

Chapter 12. Youth aspirations

In contemporary societies, the course of human life is increasingly treated as a “project.” This project is managed step by step, from the beginning (birth) to the end (death), and across all stages in between. What used to be seen as natural developmental phases - early childhood, school age, adolescence, adulthood - has turned into separate components of a life project. Each component has its own status. Together, they do not necessarily form a coherent or linear life course. These “projects” are plans for a desired future¹⁰. Yet that future, in practice, rarely becomes reality exactly as envisioned.

Late modernity is shaped by the process of individualization. In this context, risk penetrates all areas of life. Under such conditions, it becomes harder for young people to identify others who face similar experiences. Hope is often defined as a future-oriented disposition. It enables young people to imagine and pursue desired futures, or “future projects.” In youth studies, hope is not treated only as an individual feeling or a psychological state. It is understood as socially produced, constrained by structural conditions, and shaped by cultural contexts. Hope is closely linked to young people’s agency, aspirations, resilience, and their ability to navigate uncertainty.

According to Snyder, hope consists of two key components:

- Agency: motivation to pursue goals.
- Pathways: the perceived ability to identify routes toward achieving those goals¹¹.

Youth studies expand this perspective. They underline that pathways are not equally available to everyone. Access to pathways depends on social class, gender, ethnicity, place, and the political environment. In this sense, hope is not simply optimism. It is a vision of the future that is structurally enabled - or structurally blocked.

Many scholars conceptualize hope as part of young people’s everyday strategies for survival and progress. Appadurai defines hope as the “capacity to aspire.” He treats hope as a cultural capacity, shaped by one’s social position. Honwana describes hope as a prolonged phase of waiting. In her framing, hope helps young people endure extended transitions into adulthood¹². Vigh conceptualizes hope as

¹⁰ Furlong, 2013, page 9

¹¹ Snyder, 2002

¹² Honwana, 2012

social navigation. Here, hope allows people to move through unstable and crisis-ridden contexts. It becomes a navigational resource rather than a naïve expectation¹³.

Contemporary theorists and researchers examine hope in relation to crisis, war, and inequality. They also examine it in the context of unemployment and economic instability, migration and displacement, political uncertainty, and post-war recovery. In such settings, hope is often fragile. It is typically pragmatic and adaptive, rather than idealistic. Jeffrey notes that young people sustain hope through small everyday practices, even when upward mobility is blocked¹⁴. Ray and Lucy show that working-class youth shape hope while clearly recognizing real constraints. This is where concepts such as “limited hope” and “realistic hope” become relevant¹⁵.

Critical approaches also highlight the risks of false or imposed hope. Berlant introduces the idea of “cruel optimism.” This describes situations where society encourages people to dream, but does not create real opportunities. In such cases, hope can become harmful¹⁶. In education and youth policy, this risk appears in narratives that promote “dream big,” while leaving structural inequalities unchanged. In this context, scholars distinguish between:

- Empowering hope (grounded in real opportunities)
- Illusory hope (which masks barriers)

In the civic engagement literature, hope is also treated as a driver of collective agency and social transformation. Hope can be strengthened through education, participation, and meaningful inclusion. Freire emphasizes that hope is political and collective action. It is not passive waiting¹⁷.

The research shows that Armenian young people’s future projects are marked by a crisis of hope and deep existential uncertainty. Their perceptions of the future are also internally contradictory. Many express high educational ambitions and a sense of civic responsibility. At the same time, they speak about profound disappointment, distrust, and the loss of hope. The future is not experienced as a space of open possibilities. It is perceived as a horizon of constant risk, vulnerability, and existential uncertainty. This condition is expressed in the

¹³ Vigh, 2009

¹⁴ Jeffrey, 2010

¹⁵ Reay & Lucey, 2000

¹⁶ Berlant, 2011

¹⁷ Freire, 1994

language of weakened trust in the future and persistent tension about “tomorrow.”

The participants of the research note that before the war, the future felt relatively stable and predictable. After the war, the future no longer appears as a trustworthy horizon. This is the case even when public discourse continues to speak about peace. Fear of the future is often expressed without specific scenarios. Instead, it is described as a general sense that “trust has not yet been restored.”

Young people’s visions of the future are shaped by practical goals, life-course transitions, and post-crisis uncertainty. Despite instability and socio-political volatility, participants often articulate relatively clear goals. However, these goals tend to be short-term. They mainly relate to employment, economic independence, and basic stability.

The experience of students who moved from the regions to Yerevan shows an important constraint. Future projects are often formed under conditions of limited everyday resources. Transport difficulties, long commuting times, and physical and mental fatigue reduce not only study effectiveness. They also reduce the capacity to plan for the future. In these circumstances, the future is built less through ideal ambitions. It is built through managing energy and making daily life more controllable.

Notably, goals are usually framed in personal biographical terms. Participants speak about “returning to work” or “having the business I want.” They rarely frame goals through the language of broad social change. This aligns with the individualization processes discussed in youth studies. Life paths increasingly become “biographical projects,” and risk management shifts onto the individual. Long-term planning is limited. Few participants describe clear 5 - 10 year strategies. This can be interpreted as an effect of structural uncertainty and low trust. The future is perceived as conditional and contingent, rather than predictable and programmable.

Future projects are strongly shaped by the problems and challenges young people face in Armenia today. Participants most often mention financial difficulties and low incomes. They also mention the lack of job opportunities for young people in the regions and the mismatch between education and employment. Uncertainty about the future is also named as a key problem.

Financial hardship becomes especially intense in the context of housing insecurity. The inability to own a home, or being stuck in long-term rental arrangements, is experienced as more than a material problem. It is perceived as a major barrier to stabilizing the future. Housing appears as a symbolic anchor of hope. Its absence deepens uncertainty and the sense of dependence.

For students from the regions, transport inconvenience is also a major issue. They also raise concerns about education quality and teacher shortages.

If I leave early, there are no traffic jams, I arrive quickly, and the whole day is in front of me—I can manage my day. But if I go after 3 p.m., at any time, I spend 1.5 - 2 hours on the road, just standing in traffic. Then I arrive tired and my brain isn't capable of studying. I need some time to rest. I can't focus and study properly, so I mostly leave studying for Saturday - Sunday."

Quote from a FGD with students from the regions

Students living in Yerevan also face financial pressure. Some universities provide dormitories, but the number of places is far too limited. Renting housing in Yerevan adds a serious financial burden, and not all families can cover these costs.

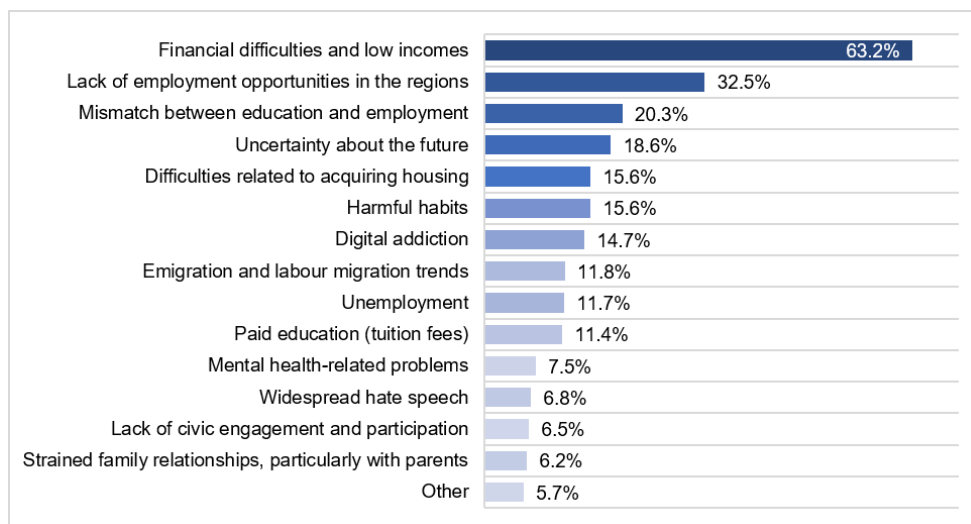


Figure 34. In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing youth in Armenia? (ages 13–35, % of respondents)

These everyday socio-economic constraints are not only material difficulties. They also shape young people's time, energy, and relationship to the future. Over time, they erode the sense that life is predictable.

Before the war, life was... I wouldn't say monotonous, but it was a good, stable routine. There weren't negative images or fears about the future. After the war, even though we keep talking about peace and borders and so on, I personally feel fear about the next day. Before the war, there was some stability and trust in the future. After the war, I don't have that trust. Even if we keep saying 'peace, peace,' it still hasn't formed for me.

IDI with a young woman in the business field

For some young people, the future is constructed as a clearly defined educational and professional project: moving from a bachelor's degree to a master's program, then to doctoral studies, an academic career, professional advancement, or establishing a personal business. This reflects a classic "transition" model, in which education is viewed as the primary pathway to social mobility. At the same time, across different groups of young people, the future is increasingly framed as the outcome of individual effort rather than as a pathway supported by institutions or the system.

Simultaneously, a number of participants explicitly reject "grand ambitions," emphasizing instead the need to establish a stable foundation and to feel secure. This position points to the erosion of political idealism among young people and the strengthening of pragmatic rationality. The future is thus perceived less as a space of collective progress and more as a challenge of personal survival and stabilization.

The geographical imagination of the future is similarly ambivalent. On the one hand, some participants envision their future in Armenia, centered on family formation, stability, and a moral sense of obligation to stay. The question of "staying or leaving" is often framed not as a free choice, but as a tension between moral responsibility and existential fear. Staying is described as a duty - "if I leave too, who will stay?" - while leaving is frequently associated with acute security concerns. This duality suggests that geographical choices have become questions of existence rather than lifestyle.

On the other hand, the idea of working or studying abroad is articulated as a rational strategy to offset economic inequality and ensure material security. Notably, migration options are rarely expressed in the language of idealized mobility. Instead, they follow a logic of calculation and adaptation. Migration is thus understood not as a "dream," but as a practical strategy of social adjustment.

One of the most striking discursive elements concerns hope itself, encapsulated in the statement: "In my opinion, there is no hope." This phrase symbolically signals

the collapse of hope's social and institutional foundations. Hope no longer draws sustenance from political, economic, or societal prospects. Instead, it survives primarily at the level of cultural, emotional, and inherited belonging—"love passed down through genes," "mentality," "culture." Hope shifts from the future toward the past. It becomes not a future-oriented disposition, but an obligation rooted in history. This contradicts classical definitions of hope as a future-centered category and reflects a temporal rupture typical of post-war and post-crisis societies.

Another key tension emerges in the phrase "if I leave too, who will stay?" Here, future orientation intersects with moral responsibility. Staying is framed not as opportunity, but as obligation. At the same time, there is a cold existential fear on the opposite side: "what if we wake up in Azerbaijan," "what if they come and kill us in our homes." This language reveals that the future is perceived through the prism of existential threat. It is no longer a question of social development, but of physical survival. Such deep uncertainty has significant psychological effects and generates a background of chronic stress.

Narratives of the young people also clearly express perceptions of institutional inefficiency of the state. They point to shortages of qualified professionals, systemic crisis, and underutilization of resources. This is not merely dissatisfaction, but skepticism toward the very possibility of constructing a viable future. Statements such as "Armenia is so far behind that I wouldn't even be afraid to wake up under another country's flag" reflect not only fear of loss, but a sense of irreversibility.

When asked how young people's lives could be improved, respondents consistently emphasize the issue of "using human potential." Low wages, devalued professions, and lack of professional dignity are described as forms of "killing potential." Young people speak not only about material poverty, but about wasted energy, unrealized capacities, and blocked self-actualization.

Emotional mapping of the future is dominated by fear and distrust, indicating deep anxiety and disappointment underlying young people's responses. When asked to describe their feelings about the future in a single word, participants mentioned:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Uncertainty | • Hope |
| • Security | • Stability |
| • Fear | • Distrust |
| • Excitement | • Travel |
| • Faith | |

The words associated with the future - such as “hope,” “stability,” and “travel” - reflect strong internal contradictions. On the one hand, there is a desire for stability and predictability. On the other, there is a longing for escape, movement, and crossing boundaries. Travel here can be interpreted not only as leisure, but as a symbolic expression of freedom, autonomy, and release from constraints. This contradiction is characteristic of post-crisis youth, who simultaneously seek security and distance from their environment. It reflects the dual tension between “rootedness” and “departure,” often observed among groups shaped by war, displacement, and social upheaval.

Most young people report having relatively clear future plans related to employment and education. Other goals focus on material well-being and travel.

Table 9. What are your main life goals for the next 1 - 3 years?

Goal	% of responses	% of respondents
Employment-related plans	18.0%	40.8%
Education-related plans	15.7%	35.4%
Start a family	7.1%	16.1%
Purchase housing / build a home	4.2%	9.5%
Establish a personal business / expand an existing business	5.7%	12.8%
Ensure material well-being for myself and my family	16.4%	37.0%
Serve in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia	1.9%	4.4%
Travel, rest, and engage in leisure activities	11.0%	24.8%
Purchase a car or other high-value assets	3.4%	7.6%
Emigrate for permanent residence	3.1%	6.9%
Continue living my normal life	11.3%	25.5%
Have not thought about it / have no specific goals	1.2%	2.8%
Other	1.1%	2.5%

According to the research participants hope is most often anchored in concrete, material, and controllable resources. Stable employment, housing, and family function as key pillars of psychological security and symbolic foundations of safety. Housing and work acquire not only economic but also symbolic meaning, representing stability, security, and rootedness. Importantly, expressions of hope are largely individual and family-centered rather than public or institutional. Young people rarely associate hope with the state, political systems, or public institutions. This reflects a deficit of trust and the weakening of institutional anchors, resulting in the retreat of hope to the micro level - family, work, and

personal achievement. Overall, young people's visions of the future in Armenia emerge at the intersection of a crisis of hope, institutional distrust, and existential insecurity. The future is no longer seen as an open horizon of opportunity, but as a fragile and often blocked space. Hope shifts from the public to the personal, from the future to the past, and from institutions to inherited belonging. In this context, resilience becomes less a product of systemic support and more a form of psychological self-protection - a trend that poses serious long-term risks, including emigration, disengagement, and civic withdrawal.

Part 3. Conclusions

A comprehensive analysis of the research findings allows the following conclusions to be drawn.

- Most young people associate the beginning of youth with the ages of 15–16 and its end with around 35. Clear gender differences emerge. Young women tend to perceive youth as starting earlier and ending sooner, while young men view it as a longer life phase. This reflects gendered timelines of socialization, family formation, and responsibility. Youth is primarily linked to growing independence, increased responsibility, and the expansion of social roles. Key transition points include completing school, entering vocational or higher education, studying away from home, military service, living independently from parents, and civic engagement. These findings confirm that youth is understood less as a biological age category and more as a social status shaped by role transitions. Youth in Armenia is therefore best understood as a socially constructed, multidimensional, and dynamic transitional phase rather than a fixed age category.
- The experience of war, particularly among young people displaced from Artsakh, functions as a sharp boundary between childhood and youth. War, military service, and related emotional trauma are perceived as accelerated mechanisms of “growing up.” They produce heightened responsibility and a sense of premature maturity. This indicates that in post-war Armenian society, the boundaries of youth are often redefined by non-normative and crisis-driven events. These crisis experiences disrupt normative life-course sequencing and reshape the social meaning and temporal boundaries of youth.
- The end of youth is most commonly associated with becoming a parent. Parenthood is perceived as a stage marked by restricted freedom and a sharp increase in responsibility. It is seen as closing the period of carefree and experimental life. This perception is especially pronounced among women who experienced early motherhood.
- In young people’s perceptions, the image of youth is built around activity, independence, responsibility, and goal orientation. Youth is seen as a period of energy, strength, openness to change, and readiness to try new things. At the same time, it is associated with carefreeness, experimentation, and self-discovery. This reflects the dual nature of youth as both responsible and free. This reflects the dual nature of youth as simultaneously a period of freedom, experimentation, and self-discovery, and a stage of responsibility, purposefulness, and the formation of independence.

- Civic and political engagement is also considered an important component of youth. Young people associate youth with political activity, participation in protests, volunteering, and public struggle. This shows that youth is perceived not only as a personal life stage but also as a period of social engagement. At the same time, young people describe strong polarization within the youth field in Armenia. One group is characterized by patriotism, activism, and future orientation, while another is marked by apathy, disengagement, and withdrawal from public life. This reflects an “asymmetrical model” of participation in which young people demonstrate interest and willingness to engage while simultaneously avoiding high-risk institutional political participation.
- The experience of constant comparison is perceived ambivalently. On the one hand, it serves as motivation and a stimulus for self-development. On the other, it generates psychological pressure, anxiety, and feelings of devaluation. Social comparison, especially in education, career, and social achievement, produces ongoing tension and fragile self-esteem.
- Today, the choice of profession among Armenian youth is shaped more by early educational socialization and access to educational opportunities than by labor market calculations. Armenia’s educational landscape is characterized by expanded access alongside deepening problems of quality, efficiency, and equity. General education schools and formal vocational pathways do not fully provide the core competencies needed to form a stable professional identity or enter the labor market.
- Territorial inequality persists in vocational and higher education systems. Outdated infrastructure, curricula misaligned with labor market demand, and weak career guidance remain widespread. As a result, professional choice and identity often develop through trial, job changes, and, in many cases, disappointment.
- The pathway of professional choice is dynamic and evolving rather than a stage completed with graduation. Almost half of young people are employed, and most wish to change their workplace. The average age of labor market entry is around 19. The majority work outside their field of specialization. Professional identity is therefore often formed through experience, adaptation, and reassessment rather than through stable and predictable educational pathways.
- Most young people continue to live in the parental household. Although they emphasize independence in decision-making, they rely heavily on parents, partners, and friends for practical support. This reflects a key feature of transitional life stages: the coexistence of aspirations for autonomy with

continued dependency. This combination of autonomy and dependence reflects the prolonged and unstable nature of contemporary youth transitions.

- Housing assessments reveal gender differences. Young women report higher dissatisfaction. Increasing age is associated with reduced willingness to relocate. Perceived deterioration of the social environment significantly increases migration intentions. This suggests that youth migration is shaped not only by individual choice but also by structural conditions.
- Migration intentions are strongest among young, unmarried, highly educated, urban youth, particularly in Yerevan. At the same time, more than half of young people do not want to live separately from their family. Aspirations for independence are constrained by economic insecurity, housing problems, and the need for social support.
- Young people's decisions regarding migration, housing, and independence are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by broader structural conditions, particularly economic insecurity and limited opportunities for stable independent living. As a result, independence is often experienced not as an achievable reality, but as a postponed and continuously delayed goal.
- Friendship and romantic relationships are central to young people's lives. These relationships are often marked by trust issues, unclear boundaries, and ambiguity. Such patterns reflect changing gender roles and the instability of contemporary relationship models. Uncertainty and avoidance of responsibility are perceived as sources of emotional insecurity.
- Civic and political participation in Armenia is characterized by a gap between interest and perceived impact. Many young people believe they can influence decisions at the community level. Far fewer feel the same at the national level.
- Almost one third of eligible young voters express willingness to participate in local and parliamentary elections. This may indicate both political uncertainty and limited trust.
- Most young people are not members of any organization. Among those involved in civil society organizations, girls and youth aged 13-22 predominate. This points to age- and gender-based differentiation in civic engagement. Despite low institutional political participation, the vast majority of young people follow socio-political developments in Armenia and globally. Volunteering is the most common form of civic participation, while participation in civic movements is the least common. Girls are more active in volunteering, donations, and charity events. The highest overall activity is observed among youth aged 18-22.

- Young people show interest in socio-political processes but avoid deeper political engagement. Key barriers include hate speech in the political field and the perception of politics as a high-risk sphere where effort does not lead to meaningful outcomes. These factors reduce willingness to take active political roles.
- Youth health and well-being in Armenia are shaped by intersecting pressures. These include socio-economic inequality, war and post-conflict experiences, uncertainty about the future, sedentary lifestyles, mental health challenges, and limited institutional support.
- Although most young people still report relatively positive self-assessments of well-being and quality of life, the data reveal hidden vulnerabilities, accumulated stress, and individualized resilience. Well-being increasingly depends on personal resources, family support, and self-regulation rather than systemic assistance.
- Leisure practices are shaped by global trends, local cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, and life-stage constraints. Education and work dominate daily schedules, leaving leisure as secondary. Nevertheless, free time plays a key role in self-expression, social bonding, and psychological recovery. Core leisure preferences include socializing with friends, digital engagement through social media, music, and helping family members. This indicates that youth leisure combines peer interaction with family obligations.
- Social media occupies a central place in everyday life. The digital environment is not only a space for entertainment but also for socialization, identity formation, and belonging. Preferences are strongly shaped by financial resources. If resources were available, young people would travel more, engage in sports, attend leisure venues, and invest in self-development. Many emphasize learning new skills, especially foreign languages, musical instruments, media, and entrepreneurial skills. Leisure thus often has an instrumental, future-oriented dimension.
- War and its consequences have disrupted biographical transitions, deepened insecurity, reduced institutional trust, and narrowed future horizons. At the same time, these experiences have generated strong moral responsibility, a sense of belonging, and readiness to serve. Young people attempt to remain active within a constrained environment. This often leads to frustration, while hope becomes fragile but persistent. In this context, hope should be understood not as a psychological state but as a socially conditioned, politically charged, and morally burdened practice.

- Young people's perceptions of the future are shaped at the intersection of a crisis of hope, institutional distrust, and existential fear. The future is no longer seen as an open horizon but as a risky, vulnerable, and often closed space. Hope has shifted from public to private, from future to past, and from institutions to inherited belonging. Young people remain in Armenia not because of confidence but because of obligation, guilt, and cultural attachment. Resilience increasingly functions as a form of individual psychological self-defense rather than systemic support. This represents a serious long-term risk, leading to both migration and internal disengagement.

Finally, transitions to independence among Armenian youth are non-linear, fragmented, and contradictory. Aspirations for autonomy, migration intentions, continued family dependence, and relational uncertainty create a social reality in which future-oriented choices are shaped not only by personal desires but also by structural constraints, political instability, economic insecurity, and pervasive uncertainty.

Part 4. Policy Recommendations

The findings indicate that transitions to independence among young people in Armenia take place in a complex, fragmented, and structurally constrained environment. Youth policy therefore needs to move away from a normative model of “linear transitions” and instead be rebuilt around young people’s real-life experiences, vulnerabilities, and diverse pathways, recognizing the existence of fragmented and non-linear trajectories toward independence.

- **Rethinking the definition of youth and policy targeting:**

- Youth policy should recognize that the beginning and end of youth are understood not only through age but through social roles, responsibilities, and lived experiences as perceived by young people themselves. Policy frameworks must therefore reflect youth as a socially constructed life phase rather than a fixed age category.
- A phased approach to youth policy is recommended, for example distinguishing early youth, transitional youth, and late youth. Each phase should be supported through targeted interventions in education, employment, family formation, and independent living. Gender differences must be systematically integrated into policy design, particularly in education, employment, parenting, and housing programs.

- **Strengthening the transition from education to employment:**

- A system-wide strengthening of the institutional system supporting education-to-work transitions is required. Career guidance should be institutionalized from secondary school through vocational and higher education.
- Career orientation must be based on real labor market data rather than individual preferences alone. To reduce territorial inequality, targeted investments are needed in regional educational institutions, including infrastructure, teaching staff, and curriculum modernization.

- **Labor market and youth employment policy:**

- State-supported programs facilitating young people’s entry into their first job are essential. These may include subsidized jobs, wage co-financing, and tax incentives for employers hiring young workers.
- Policy should focus not only on employment quantity but also on job quality. Since many young people work outside their field of specialization and wish to change jobs, flexible reskilling and upskilling programs are recommended, particularly for the 23 - 29 age group.

- **Housing policy and support for independent living:**
 - Housing insecurity is one of the main barriers to youth independence, family planning, and life stability. Affordable housing programs for young people are needed, including rent subsidies, preferential mortgages for young families, and community-based housing initiatives.
 - Housing policy should be framed not as social assistance but as an institutional foundation for youth independence. As deterioration of the local social environment increases migration intentions, integrated community development programs are needed, focusing on infrastructure, cultural life, safety, and access to services. Special attention should be paid to young women's housing vulnerability and perceptions of safety.
- **Migration policy and incentives to stay:**
 - Migration intentions should be understood as structural signals rather than purely individual choices. Policies should aim to retain and return young people through scholarships, employment guarantees, and housing support, through dedicated retention and return programs.
 - To counter excessive concentration in Yerevan, real opportunities for young people must be expanded in the regions, including education, employment, and cultural life.
- **Mental health and well-being:**
 - Given the cumulative effects of war, uncertainty, and chronic stress, public mental health services targeting young people are urgently needed. These should include free or affordable psychological support, counseling, and group-based programs.
 - Psychological services should be mandatory in schools and higher education institutions. A shift is needed from an individualized coping model toward building institutional resilience and institutionalized forms of collective support.
- **Rebuilding civic and political participation:**
 - For many young people, social media has become the only space where they feel heard. This reflects not digital empowerment but the absence of meaningful institutional participation.
 - Permanent youth participation mechanisms should be established at national and community levels. These may include official online platforms where young people can register, present problems, proposals, and solutions; local youth councils with advisory status and real influence; and two-stage participation models where young people first articulate problems and then co-develop solutions with expert support.

- Regular, trust-based, informal meetings between young people and decision-makers should be institutionalized. Since young people are interested in socio-political issues but avoid institutional participation, low-risk and credible engagement formats are needed, including youth councils, participatory budgeting mechanisms, and consultative bodies.
- Hate speech in the political arena must be actively addressed, as it represents a major deterrent for youth participation. The relatively high civic engagement of young women should be leveraged through targeted women's leadership programs.
- **Building a policy of trust toward youth:**
 - Young people in Armenia have long been exposed to public narratives and negative generational stereotypes that portray their generation in negative terms, contributing to feelings of devaluation and diminished public trust. To address this, a dedicated public communication strategy is needed that reframes youth as a societal resource rather than a problem, increases the visibility of youth achievements in education, science, business, culture, and defense, and ensures young people's involvement in state programs not only as beneficiaries but also as co-creators. Building trust in youth should become a structural principle of public policy, rather than a rhetorical gesture.
- **Supporting relationships, family formation, and social ties:**
 - Uncertainty and trust deficits in young people's relationships highlight the need for life-skills education. Key areas include communication, boundary-setting, and conflict management.
 - Programs preparing young people for family formation are recommended, particularly for young couples. In cases of early parenthood, social and psychological support for young parents is essential to prevent isolation and vulnerability.
- **Leisure, culture, and self-development.**
 - As free time plays a critical role in identity formation and well-being, accessible youth cultural, sports, and educational infrastructure should be developed, especially in the regions.
 - Non-formal education programs, skill development initiatives, and support for creative industries should be expanded. Social media can be used not only for entertainment but also for civic education, participation, and self-development.
- **Rebuilding hope as a policy priority:**
 - Public policy should move beyond expectations of obligation and instead provide young people with meaning, perspective, and confidence in the

future. This requires greater predictability in decision-making, fairness in institutions, genuine opportunities for participation, and visible, tangible outcomes that demonstrate that engagement leads to change.

- Education policy should explicitly recognize its role not only in skills development but also in shaping young people's sense of possibility, professional identity, and trust in society. Ensuring fairness, transparency, and equal access within the education system is essential for strengthening long-term confidence in the future.
- Educational reform should modernize educational content and curricula with an emphasis on critical thinking, life skills, civic education, and psychological resilience. Practical orientation must be strengthened in universities and colleges through mandatory internships and structured partnerships with employers. Career guidance should begin at school level to support informed professional choices, while targeted investment is needed to reduce territorial inequalities by improving infrastructure, teaching capacity, and program quality in regional institutions.

The central challenge facing young people in Armenia lies not in a lack of motivation, but in a deficit of systemic trust. Young people demonstrate a clear willingness to live, work, and create in their country. Yet these choices are too often driven by obligation, guilt, and cultural attachment rather than by a sense of security, confidence, and institutional reliability. In this context, the primary objective of youth policy should not be to “activate” young people, but to restore the conditions under which the future becomes viable, imaginable, and just. Youth policy must focus on rebuilding trust, expanding real opportunities, and ensuring that commitment to the country is sustained by dignity, predictability, and meaningful prospects rather than by moral pressure alone.

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About author

Marina Galstyan is a sociologist, researcher, and founder of the Center for Educational Research and Consulting. She holds a PhD in Sociology from Yerevan State University, where she defended her dissertation on the social adaptation practices of young people in post-war Armenia. Her research interests include youth studies, education, youth and education policy, social adaptation, and the social consequences of war and uncertainty.

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Her monograph, *Armenian Youth at the Crossroads of Uncertainty and Hope*, published in June 2026 draws on extensive mixed-methods research conducted across Armenia. It reflects her long-standing commitment to youth studies, evidence-based youth policy, and sociological inquiry into contemporary youth transitions in contexts of polycrisis and uncertainty.

Center for Educational Research and Consulting is an independent research organisation based in Armenia. Established in 2012, it specialises in educational research, youth studies, policy analysis, and evidence-based consultancy. The Centre conducts applied research, evaluations, and policy studies in collaboration with academic institutions, government institutions, international organisations, and civil society organisations, contributing to the development of evidence-informed policies and practices.

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